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THE TEMPLE PRIMERS

ON THE EXERCISE OF JUDGMENT IN LITERATURE

By

W. BASIL WORSFOLD



LAOCOON

JUDGMENT IN LITERATURE



BY · W · BASIL WORSFOLD

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LITERARY CRITICISM

Chapter I

Art

In nearly all large towns, and especially in the capital cities of civilized nations, there are collections of statues, pictures, and books. Even in the streets we see the forms of men and women, wrought in marble or cast in bronze, placed high upon pedestals to meet the gaze of every one who may pass by them. In nearly every house there are pictures upon the walls, and vases or other ornaments arranged upon shelves, and books lying on the table; and in large houses there are whole chambers set apart solely for collections of pictures and statuary, or lined with rows of books. The mere existence of these objects shows us that Art is an element in the life of civilized man, for we should not care to surround ourselves with such things, unless we wished our minds to be sometimes occupied both with them and with the thoughts which they suggest.

Criticism is the exercise of judgment in the province of Art and Literature, and the Critic is a person who is possessed of the knowledge necessary to enable him to pronounce right judgments upon the merit or worth of such works as come within this province. The term "judgment"—κρίσις—was first used in this special sense by the Alexandrian Scholars (300 B.C.-146 B.C.), who approached the study of books under five heads, the arrangement of the matter (διόρθωσις), the fixing of accents (ἀνάγνωσις), the syntax (τέχνη), explanatory comment (ἐξήγησις), and "judgment" on the merit and authorship of the work in question (κρίσις). It was therefore primarily applied to judgment upon books,

and indeed even now when we speak of "criticism" and "critics," we generally refer to such literary judgment; but when we wish to indicate a judgment on works of art other than books, we place a qualifying word before the term, and speak of Art Criticism, or Dramatic Criticism, as the case may be. Here, too, we shall use the words "Criticism" and "Critic" chiefly, though not entirely, in this original and specialized sense of "judgment" and "judges" of books.

Just as there are certain principles of morality, recognized, if not universally, at least very generally by all civilized men, by reference to which we govern our conduct, so are there certain principles of Criticism of wide, if not universal, validity, by reference to which we guide our decisions in matters of taste. A knowledge of these principles, by teaching us to think rightly about works of art and literature, enables us to gain the fullest enjoyment both from these works and from the physical existences, or the facts of life, of which they are representations, in the same way as the principles of morality teach us to control our actions so as to be happy ourselves and contribute to the happiness of our neighbours. But while morality, or the art of right living, covers the whole field of man's existence, criticism is concerned with an element only of that existence; and the first point which we have to consider is, therefore, the nature and extent of this element—in other words we must form some definite notion of what Art is, and of the part which it plays in the life of man.

In order to do this we will first recall the several arts and the works which they respectively produce, and then endeavour to collect the facts so recalled in a general idea.

At the outset we are met by a distinction which separates works of art into two classes—the distinction between the "Fine" Arts and the "Lesser" or "Mechanical" Arts. The Fine Arts are Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music, and Poetry.[1] The Lesser Arts are those of the smith, the

[1] To these we might add the composite art called the Drama, the art of Oratory, and the lost art of Dancing.

carpenter, the cabinet-maker, the mason, the potter, the weaver, the glass-maker, the house painter, and others like them. The distinction which separates these two classes is based upon the fact, that broadly speaking the arts of the first class minister to the enjoyment of man, while those of the latter minister to his needs. They are both alike manifestations of the development of man; but the Fine Arts are concerned mainly with his moral and intellectual growth, and the Lesser Arts with his physical and material well-being. And between these typical arts of the second class and the Fine Arts, there are others, such as engraving on wood or copper, painting on china or glass, carving in wood, the designing of decorations for walls or patterns for fabrics, which may belong to either class according to the degree of merit displayed by the artist.

The origin and purpose of the Lesser Arts are simple and easily understood. These arts, arising from man's natural desire to provide himself conveniently with the elementary requirements of food and shelter, clothing and locomotion, grew with the growth of civilization. Their purpose is no less definite; and the principle which lies at their foundation, and which itself furnishes a test of the merit of the works which they severally produce, is utility. So far-reaching is this principle that they are often (and rightly) called the "useful" arts. The characteristic merit, therefore, of a house, of a chair, or of a vessel in metal or clay, is to fulfil the purpose for which it is intended; and beauty of form in them is nothing else than the instant revelation of this capacity. It is mainly[1] by virtue of this revelation that such objects satisfy the eye and mind; and all decoration, or decorative effect, which does not contribute to this revelation, being meaningless, lessens instead of increasing the beauty of the objects it is intended to adorn.

We need say little, therefore, about the Lesser Arts: but we must consider the Fine Arts more at length, for the

[1] I say mainly, because colour and the lustre of polished metal, are elements of beauty in themselves.

nature of these latter is more complex, and to this day there is no complete agreement among critical writers concerning either their precise origin, or their exact purpose. We shall have to notice the significance of this disagreement with respect to the art of Poetry, when we come to consider the test of Merit in Literature. Henceforward, therefore, in speaking of "the Arts" and of "Art," I shall refer exclusively to the Fine Arts and to Fine Art.

There are two classifications of the Arts which are helpful. The first divides them into the Arts of the "Eye" and the Arts of the "Ear," according as they respectively use one or other of the senses of sight or hearing as their primary channel of approach to the mind. Thus grouped we get the arts of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting placed in broad contrast to the arts of Music and Poetry. By the second they are arranged with reference to the greater or less degree in which they severally depend upon a material basis for the realization of their respective purposes. On this principle Hegel places Architecture *lowest*, and Poetry *highest*, in order of dignity. Architecture is placed lowest because in the manifestations of this art, the material basis is most prominent: and, indeed, it is only the purpose expressed in the arrangement of the materials, which raises the masses of stone or brick reared by the architect to the dignity of works of Art. Next to Architecture is Sculpture. Here, too, the basis is wholly material; but the sculptor gives to the marble or metal, which forms his medium, a significance entirely unlike any which these materials possess in themselves. For out of the dead block he carves the semblance of a living form. From Sculpture we advance to Painting, where the material basis is reduced by the rejection of the third dimension of space to the plane surface of the canvas—that is, to length and breadth. But upon this surface the Painter produces a semblance of material objects which is possessed alike of substance, form, and colour. Then comes Music, where the sole basis of material reality is the volume of sound, but where the sounds are so arranged by the

Musician that they represent distinct emotions, and even serve to create the actual emotions which they severally represent in the mind of the hearer. Lastly, there is Poetry, which is so far removed from the material, that its very medium (with the exception of the element of metre) consists solely of symbols—of words, or combinations of words, which recall ideas to the mind.

These two classifications are helpful, as I have said. The facts which they serve to bring into prominence are these. First, the arts require a material basis to work upon, ranging from the stone and brick of Architecture to the word-symbols of Poetry. Second, the main channels by which they approach the mind are the sense of sight, and (in a much less degree) the sense of hearing. Third, and most important, both this material basis and these two channels, are merely the means by which the mind of the artist communicates with the mind of the spectator. Works of Art, therefore, from a cathedral to a sonnet, are symbolic; that is to say they have a quality which is addressed to, and perceived by, the mind, over and above the quality, or qualities, which are perceived by the senses. Now, perhaps, having got so far as this, we can gather up these facts in a general idea and venture upon a definition of Art. *Art, then, is the presentation of the real in its mental aspect.*

In order to realize the significance of this definition we will take each of the Arts separately, and consider (1) its material basis; (2) the means which it employs to bring this material basis under the cognisance of the senses; and (3) the greater or less prominence which it gives to the mental aspect of the reality which it thus presents to the mind.

In Architecture the material basis is of the coarsest kind. It consists of the stone, brick, metal and wood, which, with other materials, are used in the erection of buildings. As this medium is wholly material, the eye is affected in precisely the same manner by the works which the architect produces, as it is by any other external object. All the effects of sunshine, light and shade, colour, atmosphere, site or natural

position and surroundings, are at his disposal, and he does not require any artifice, such as we shall see other artists require, in using the channel of sight to approach the mind.[1] And this for two reasons: first, he does not represent life or movement, and, second, his work is possessed of precisely the same attributes of solidity, form, and colour, as any other inanimate external object. Nevertheless, the external masses which he creates, though they are real, are also realities presented in a mental aspect. In other words, they are expressive of ideas. The Gothic Cathedral—to take the most familiar example—is not merely a place where people worship, but it is itself a place of worship—a building so constructed that it expresses the aspirations of man for eternal life in its form and features. This is the thought embodied alike in the profusion of pinnacles, in the sky-piercing spires, and in the upward springing shafts which carry its lofty roof. But, although architecture here presents a place of worship in its mental aspect—that is to say, the Cathedral which the architect builds is representative of his idea of a place of Christian worship — yet the material, or sensuous, element is so prominent, that it is possible for the spectator to be impressed and even delighted by works of architecture, without having any consciousness of the ideas which the architect intended them to severally represent.

In the art of Sculpture the material basis is the stone or metal which is chiselled or moulded by various processes into the forms of animate or inanimate objects. The sculptor has all the attributes of reality, except movement, at his disposal; for his work possesses solidity, form, and, if he chooses, colour, just as much as the real persons or objects which he represents. It is only, therefore, when he represents persons in motion that he needs to employ any artifice to beguile the eye of the spectator. But the absence of this attribute of movement forms a natural limit to the field

[1] Unless we make an exception of the "optical corrections" employed by the Greek architects in the construction of certain temples.

of external reality which he is free to represent; and as a result of this limit, the special and most appropriate subjects of the art of sculpture are separate figures, or separate busts, or small groups of figures, all alike in repose. These figures he represents with as little accessory detail as possible and in the simplest possible manner; and for this reason—and also because it is difficult to represent drapery in so stubborn a medium as stone or metal—the finest representations of the human figure in sculpture are partially or entirely nude. Nevertheless the mental aspect of the real is far more prominent in the sculptor's work than it is in the architect's; for the sculptor endows the stone or metal figures which he creates with the appearance of life, and presents the idea of the highest perfection of the class of being which is in each case represented. Physical beauty in repose is, therefore, the special subject of the art of sculpture.

In Painting, the material basis is provided by the canvas, board, or other surface, upon which the lines which indicate space, and the artificial colours which represent the natural colours of external objects, are respectively drawn or laid. But in proportion as this basis is less material than that of the sculptor, the painter requires a greater amount of artifice in the means which he employs to bring these lines and colours under the cognisance of the sense of sight: for he has to represent solid objects and real colours by means of lines and colours placed on a flat surface. In order to present solid objects by lines only, he must draw these lines according to rules of perspective—that is, he must draw the several outlines of the external objects which form his picture, in precisely the same positions on his canvas, as they would occupy on the field of vision of a spectator who sees them from a single point of view—and similarly, in order to represent the real colours which external objects of varying distance from the spectator assume, by his artificial colours laid on a uniform surface, he must give the correct values to the colours of each object—that is, he must make these colours more or less bright or strong in proportion as the real

objects, whose colours he thus represents, would be more or less distant from the spectator. In this way, by drawing his lines in perspective and by giving the right value to his colours, he makes the flat surface which he thus covers present to the eye the appearance of a landscape or of an interior. Moreover, in painting, the prominence given to the mental aspect of the reality thus represented is greater than in sculpture—and, of course, far greater than in Architecture —for in all cases, whether a historical event or a landscape be the subject of the picture, it is the painter's idea of the event or of the scene, and not the bare external details of the event—so far as they are known—or the exact appearance of nature, that is represented in the picture. In other words the painter idealizes in his representation of the real: he does not merely copy or imitate, but he also interprets and selects. He, like every other artist, presents the real in its mental aspect, and he addresses his work not only to the senses, but also to the mind and understanding of the spectator.

So far we have been concerned with the "arts of the eye." It remains to consider the "arts of the ear"—Music and Poetry. In both of these the material basis is less prominent, and the mental aspect of the realities represented is consequently more significant.

The sole material basis which the musician employs is sound; that is, the sound produced by the human voice, or by one or other of the musical instruments which have been invented, and perfected, in the course of past ages; and this sound is presented alone or in union with words, and is arranged in notes and separated into intervals in accordance with the rules of harmony and musical composition. But in as much as the musician by employing words calls in to his assistance the sister art of poetry, his most characteristic medium is sound alone—inarticulate sound. The obvious characteristic of this medium, considered as a means for the expression of ideas, is its extreme indefiniteness, its vagueness; and corresponding to this vagueness is the characteristic value

of music—its power to operate over a wild field of mind, to address itself to the primordial aspects of the universal soul of man. And so the charm of music appeals to the child or the savage, as well as to the learned and highly civilized. Nevertheless, the musician—apart from the rules of musical composition or execution—uses an artifice in approaching the mind through the sense of hearing. He can represent real existences, but only under the conditions of his art. An illustration will serve best to explain how he is limited by these conditions. It is the account which Victor Cousin, the French critic, gives us of the method by which Haydn, while thus recognizing the limits imposed upon him by his art, nevertheless represents a scene so material as the conflict of the elements.

"Give the wisest symphonist a tempest to render. Nothing is easier than to imitate the whistling of the winds and the noise of the thunder. But by what combination of ordered sounds could he present to our sight the lightning flashes which suddenly rend the veil of night, and that which is the most terrific aspect of the tempest, the alternate movement of the waves, now rising mountain high, now sinking and seeming to fall headlong into bottomless abysses? If the hearer has not been told beforehand what the subject is, he will never divine it, and I defy him to distinguish a tempest from a battle. In spite of scientific skill and genius, sounds cannot represent forms. Music, rightly advised, will refuse to enter upon a hopeless contest; it will not undertake to express the rise and fall of the waves and other like phenomena; it will do better; with sounds it will produce in our soul the feelings which successively arise in us during the various scenes of the tempest. It is thus that Haydn will become the rival, even the conqueror of the painter, because it has been given to music to move and sway the soul even more profoundly than painting." [1]

In respect of Poetry I need say only just so much as is necessary to complete this brief review of the arts; for we

[1] *Du Vrai, du Beau, et du Bien;* leçon ix. pp. 195-6. (ed. 27th).

shall have to consider the various aspects of this special art at length in more than one of the succeeding chapters. Poetry, then, of all the arts, has the least material basis. If we except the element of musical sound contained in metre, rhyme, and alliteration, it uses the senses of sight or hearing, as the case may be, merely to convey its word-symbols to the mind. It employs no artifice to bring these symbols to the mind which it addresses; for the words are perceived naturally by the eye or ear. But the mental aspect of the facts of life and the scenes of external nature, which are thus presented by the ideas, or combinations of ideas, of which these words are the symbols, is all important. Poetry speaks directly to the mind: for ideas, or mental pictures, are the rough material of the poet, and no medium is so powerful to affect the imagination as language. In representing reality the poet is absolutely limited by the very conditions of his art to the mental aspect of the external existences which he portrays.

Chapter II

Literature

We approach the world, that is, all reality external to ourselves, from two sides—the objective and the subjective. At every moment of our lives (except, of course, when animation is temporarily suspended in sleep) we are conscious of the world around us in two separate ways; for the sum of the sensations which make man a sentient being is derived in part from the presence of material existences, animate or inanimate,—that is, from actual contact with so much of the world as at any given moment impinges upon his senses—and in part, from the mental images ever passing and repassing through his mind, which are sometimes connected with these material existences, and sometimes entirely dissociated from them. Thus we have two outlooks upon the world. From both we look out upon realities; but

while the former shows us these realities in their objective aspect, the latter shows us them in their subjective aspect.

If we reflect a moment, we must feel that the outlook upon the world which we get through our mind alone, that is, through the images or notions of external existences which we can call up at will by memory and reason, or by both of these acting and reacting upon each other, is by far the wider. As I write, the outlook upon the world which I get through the immediate action of my senses, is confined to the four walls of the room in which I sit, and to such glimpses of buildings, trees, and passers-by, as I chance to see through the open window. But if I turn my mind away from these objects and reflect, my thoughts can range at will over the objects and existences of every country and every age—in fact, over so much of the world as is known to me by my own experience or by that of others. For in this subjective outlook I am no longer confined to my own immediate sensations, but I can draw upon my past sensations, and—what is more important still—upon the sensations of other men—men of every age and every race, whose thoughts and experience have been recorded in buildings, in works of art, in custom, and especially in the written accounts of their opinions, or of their actions, which have been preserved in books or manuscripts. And of all these secondary sources of sensation, the last, which we can gather up in the term literature, is by far the most effective and far-reaching. All art reproduces external reality in its mental aspect; but the arts—except poetry, which is the highest form of literature—employ representations of the objective aspects of reality to assist in the presentation of this mental aspect. But literature, with the sole exception (already noted) of the element of musical sound, does not need this assistance; for literature—as literature—is concerned solely with the subjective outlook upon the world.

In order to make my meaning plain, I will take a simple instance—let us say a battle—and I will try to point out the difference in the manner in which the painter and the

historian respectively bring such an event before the mind. I have on my wall a picture in which the painter, representing the objective outlook, shows me the field of battle as I should have seen it, if I had been present at a critical moment, and if I had been placed in a convenient position for seeing what was going on. He shows me the solid masses of men, the flash of steel and the dashes of bright colour, the clouds of smoke, the commander and his staff, with other prominent figures or groups of figures, and the prostrate bodies of the dead and wounded upon the ground. If I look carefully at his picture, he will give me some precise details, such as the colour and form of the various uniforms, and the disposition of the respective armies, as seen from this single point of view and at this particular moment; but all these details are such only as can be perceived by the eye. When I turn away from the picture, I sum up what I have learned by saying, "Now, I know what the battle must have been like, if I had been there." Then I turn to my bookshelves and take down a volume of history which contains an account of the same battle. As I read I find that the historian tells me quite a different class of facts. In the first place he is concerned with the subjective aspect of the event, and, therefore, his outlook is not confined to a single point of view or to a single moment of time. It covers the whole range of facts which together make up the significance of this battle as an event. He tells me the place where it took place, the number and nationality of the respective combatants, the results, immediate and remote, of the conflict, the names of the respective generals, their plans, and the skill which they showed in putting these plans into execution —all these and many other details. Moreover, he shows me how this event is connected with other events which preceded or followed it. Nevertheless, although I have been told all these details, and, perhaps, the historian's own opinions on the conduct of the respective armies, I have not received such a vivid impression of the battle as that which the painter gave me. But while this vivid impression lasted

only so long as I was actually looking at the picture, it is far easier for me to recall the description of the historian; and the notion of the battle which has been thus created in my mind, although it requires a longer time to acquire, is, when once acquired, far more complete and permanent. For the facts which he has told me, being all such as I can grasp from my subjective outlook upon the world, can be easily stored in the mind and readily called up by memory to unite in forming a mental picture—that is, an "idea," which is independent of the senses. To contrast the results of the two methods in a single sentence; when I turn from the picture I exclaim, "I have seen the battle": but when I close the book I say, "I know all about the battle; for he has told me everything that took place."

What the writer, therefore, reproduces by his word symbols, is not the external aspect of an event, not the semblance of objects as they are perceived by the senses, but the relationship of man to these events, and the impressions produced upon his mind by these objects. He does not present the building of the town, or the meeting of the council, or the battle; the mountain, or the river, or the valley, but the purposes, the words and the thoughts, which such events and scenes produce either in his own mind or in the minds of others.

Literature, then, in the widest sense, is the record of the impressions made by external realities of every kind upon great men, and of the reflections which these men have made upon them. The subject matter of literature covers the whole range of human life and activity, as well as every known manifestation of physical nature. For not only are actual events and the doings and sayings of actual persons reproduced in it, but the rules deduced from the observation of the conditions of man's life are included in its records. Similarly it presents to us not merely what individual men found to interest them in particular countries in a particular epoch, but also the general laws which have been gradually formulated by long-continued observation of the processes of

nature. And so literature plays a very important part in the life of man. It is the greatest of the secondary sources of sensation, and it makes an immense contribution to the sum total of facts—the joint result of the experience of the individual and of the race—which gives to each one of us this subjective outlook upon the world at large.

In order to realize to how large an extent the subjective existence of man is made up of the material of books, we will pause a moment to consider what literature does for us. Through literature we converse with the great dead, with Plato, with Buddha, with Montaigne, with Addison; we walk the streets of Babylon, of Athens, of Rome, of Alexandria; we see great monuments, reared ages ago and long since crumbled to the dust; we recreate the life of distant epochs, and thus by comparison gauge the progress achieved by the men of to-day. Through literature we learn wisdom from Aristotle, geometry from Euclid, law from Justinian, morality from Christ and St Paul. Literature makes the physical features, the inhabitants, the climate, the produce of the antipodes as familiar as those of the neighbouring county. More than this, the masters of creative literature have made regions of their own which they have peopled with the children of their genius. Homer has given us an Aegean of sun-lit islands and purple seas, Dante a dark and mysterious Inferno; Milton a garden of Eden; Shakespeare an Elizabethan England, with landscapes more brightly hued, and men and women more finely real, than the landscapes or the people of the England of Elizabeth; Molière a France more natural and more vivid than the France of the Grand Monarque. And so it is that Odysseus, Antigone, Beatrice, Hamlet, Tartufe and the rest, these spiritual offspring of great souls, live side by side with Moses, Alexander, Cæsar, Joan of Arc, and Henry VIII.: for literature has made the personalities of each almost as familiar to us as those of our dearest or most intimate friends.

There is one point which must be noticed, before we leave this consideration of the subjective outlook upon the

world to which literature contributes so largely. It is this: the subjective outlook reacts upon the objective. The knowledge of the world which we gain through our own previous sensations, and through literature, increases our capacity for understanding the objective world, and heightens and intensifies the pleasure which we derive from the contemplation of works of art or the face of nature. It is only by, and through, the subjective aspect of the world that we can rightly appreciate the objective. And that is why I remarked in the preceding chapter, that one of the objects for which we desire critical insight is that we may be able to appreciate not only works of art, but also the external realities of which these works are representations. It is this principle which underlies the truth which Goethe states, when he says that a traveller does not take anything out of Rome which he has not first brought into it.

In conclusion, literature is the brain of humanity. Just as in the individual the brain preserves a record of his previous sensations, of his experience, and of his acquired knowledge, and it is in the light of this record that he interprets every fresh sensation and experience; so the race at large has a record of its past in literature, and it is in the light of this record alone that its present conditions and circumstances can be understood. The message of the senses is indistinct and valueless to the individual without the co-operation of the brain; the life of the race would be degraded to a mere animal existence without the accumulated stores of previous experience which literature places at its disposal.

Chapter III

The Criticism of the Ancient World

We have seen how greatly it is due to literature that our knowledge of men and things, other than those with which we are brought into contact by the direct action of our

senses, is so extensive. Indeed, so great is the part that books play in our life, or, at least, in the formation of our several personalities, that to master the contents of certain books of admitted excellence has always been considered a chief element in a liberal education; that is to say, it is a recognized method of introducing the mind to the world at large. But while all literature thus contributes to our subjective outlook upon the world, we can recognize a broad distinction in the manner in which books render us this assistance. In the case of some books the value of the contribution consists mainly, though not exclusively, in the actual facts which they contain; in the case of others, the actual facts are of secondary importance and their chief value consists in the manner in which these facts are brought before our minds. No hard and fast line can be drawn between the two classes, but the difference may be broadly indicated by saying that while the former gives us the facts of life, the latter gives us "pictures" of life.

Let me illustrate the distinction by one or two examples. Such works as Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding," and Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," must obviously be placed under the head of books in which the facts are of first importance. Equally, the novels of George Eliot, in which she gives us a full and truthful picture of life in the Midland Counties, must be included among those books where the presentation of the facts is of more importance than the facts themselves. And so, too, in the case of "The Story of an African Farm," where we have a picture of rural life in South Africa, or in "Diana of the Crossways." Only in this latter work the personality of the central character is so commanding, that the book is not so much a picture as a portrait—a portrait of a beautiful and wayward woman who is exposed to temptation by circumstances and by the very abundance of her own gifts. Here, then, we have two distinct elements, matter and manner; and it is upon the degree in which these elements are respectively present in any given work, that the main division

of literature—the division which separates works of creative literature from works of literature, simply so-called, is based.

Now, it will be seen that this distinction is one which has a very important bearing upon criticism, which, as I have already said, is the science of forming and expressing correct judgments upon the value and merit of works of literature. And for this reason, that part of literature which is not creative, employs, not entirely but mainly, the method of science; but creative literature employs—again not entirely but mainly—the method of art. We are confronted, therefore, at the outset with the fact that there are two separate and distinct values to be looked for in books, each of which must be estimated by a separate and distinct test of merit. In literature where the creative element is very slight, or is altogether absent, and where, therefore, the method is the method of science, the man of science, the philosopher, the man who is master of the special subject treated, is the best qualified critic; but with creative literature the case is different. Here, where special knowledge is subordinate, where the facts are the broad facts of life known to all of us, where treatment is all-important and the method of presentation is the method of art, the artist is the ideal critic.

But not only are there these two distinct qualities or values to be found in the works which respectively belong to one or other of these two main divisions of literature, but these two qualities are mingled in varying proportions, and in subtle conjunctions, in the several departments of the works of which both of these main divisions are composed—in Science, Philosophy, History, Biography, the Essay, Prose-Fiction, and Poetry. Moreover, all creative literature, and all literature that is not merely science—that is, all literature in which the writer adds the work of his own mind to the facts which he presents—contains a further quality or value of which I have said nothing at present, but one which is notwithstanding very real and very important. It is the characteristic quality which Poetry shares with its sister

Arts, the quality of giving pleasure—æsthetic pleasure; that is pleasure which arises neither from a consciousness of right conduct, nor from an expectation of material profit, but which consists in a sense of enjoyment that is purely self-sufficing and disinterested. Here, then, are three distinct and characteristic elements of excellence, the presence of which can be discerned in varying degrees in works of literature—matter, manner, and the capacity to please. And as each and all are present in varying degrees and in different combinations, both in different classes of books as well as in different works of the same class, it is not surprising that great minds should have approached books from different points of view, should have proposed to measure their merit by different tests, or that the verdict of the critics upon any given work of literature should have been often confused and uncertain.

Nevertheless it is due to these efforts, tentative and inconclusive though many of them were, that we can to-day discern certain principles, the validity of which is definitely established. And in order to understand these principles it is desirable, almost necessary, to know something of the character of the several enquiries which have afforded the most ample contributions to the evolution of criticism.

The first great writer who applied himself to the study of literature, as literature, was Plato. As he was first in the field, and as, too, questions of morality possessed a commanding interest for him, it is not surprising that the first and most obvious quality of literature, namely its matter, should have absorbed his attention, and made him comparatively blind to those other qualities of manner and capacity to please, which we now recognize as being of almost equal importance. Accordingly the sole test by which Plato proposed to estimate the merit of a work of literature,—and indeed that of works of art in general,—was the greater or less degree in which the information which it conveyed corresponded to the external realities of which it treated. Starting with the principle of the interdependence of art and morals, he seems

to have regarded the works of both literature and the arts merely as vehicles for the conveyance of the truths of morality. This principle is so important in itself, and holds so important a place in Plato's system of philosophy, that I give a statement of it in his own words.

"Excellence of thought, and of harmony, and of form, and of rhythm, is connected with excellence of character, with good nature, that is, not in the sense of the colourless character which we euphemistically term 'good nature,' but in that of the disposition which is really well and nobly equipped from the point of view of character. . . .

"The qualities which are implied in this excellence of character are conspicuously present in painting and all similiar arts, in weaving and embroidery and architecture, and indeed, in the productions of all the lesser arts, and further in the constitution of bodies and of all organic growths. In all of these, excellence or defectiveness of form can be discerned. And defectiveness of form and rhythm and harmony are associated with deficiencies of thought and of character, while the corresponding artistic excellencies are associated with the corresponding moral excellencies of self-restraint and goodness; indeed, they are directly expressive of them. . . .

"We must look for artists who are able out of the goodness of their own natures to trace the nature of beauty and perfection, that so our young men, like persons who live in a healthy place, may be perpetually influenced for good. Every impression which they receive through eye or ear will come from embodiments of beauty, and this atmosphere, like the health-giving breeze which flows from bracing regions, will imperceptibly lead them from their earliest childhood into association and harmony with the Spirit of Truth, and into love for that Spirit." [1]

Regarding literature and art from this point of view, Plato used criticism as a means of ascertaining to what extent a work of literature conveyed truthful and wholesome informa-

[1] Republic; p. 400-1 (St.): as translated in the author's "Principles of Criticism."

tion upon the facts of life. In the application of this test of "truth," he found that the Greek literature current in his day—which included in particular the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, the Lyrics of Pindar, and the masterpieces of the Athenian dramatists—was deficient in morality. "Poets and prose-writers," he says, "are mistaken in dealing with human life in the most important respects. They give us to understand that many evil livers are happy and many righteous men unhappy; and that wrong-doing, if it be undetected, is profitable, while honest dealing is beneficial to one's neighbour, but damaging to one's self."[1] In addition to this general charge of immorality based upon the character of the subject matter of Greek creative literature, he finds, by the application of the same test, that its method is also deficient. It is in this latter criticism that the limitations which his age imposed upon him are most apparent. For Plato, not perceiving that literature is by the nature of things concerned exclusively with the subjective outlook upon the world, counts as a defect what is in fact its crowning virtue—that the poet, or writer of creative literature, reproduces in his representations of the real, not realities, but the mental aspects of these realities. Consequently he is led into the absurdity of placing the writer who *describes* a real object—that is reproduces the mental image of that object by his word symbols—as lower in the scale of truthful representation, than the artist who copies the object in line and colour, and still lower than the artificer who makes —to use his own example—the bed which is the material reality upon which both the description and the painting are alike based. In other words the distinction between the truth of the senses and the truth of the idea—or the truth of logic and the truth of art—has not yet been discerned even by so acute a thinker as Plato. And so he condemns the mental pictures which he found in creative literature as being unreal, and therefore useless for purposes of instruction.

To this defect of unreality, due directly to the method of creative literature, Plato adds another defect, also arising,

[1] *Ibid.* p. 392.

though less directly, out of its method. For the purpose of making effective pictures of life, the poets—and he is thinking especially of the Attic tragedians—are compelled to select and reproduce bad actions and passionate characters, rather than good actions and normal characters. For "the irascible temperament admits of constant and varied reproduction, while the wise and quiet temperament, which scarcely ever varies, is neither easily reproduced nor, when reproduced, readily comprehended." [1] And so an acquaintance with creative literature will tend, he thinks, to foster the emotional element of man's nature to the detriment of the intellectual. "The part of the soul," he writes, "which is forcibly kept down in the case of our own misfortunes, and which craves to weep and bewail itself without stint and take its fill of grief, being so constituted as to find satisfaction in these emotions, is the very part which is filled and pleased by the poets; while that which is naturally the noblest part of us, because it is not adequately disciplined by reason and habit, releases its guard over this emotional part, representing to itself that the sufferings which it contemplates are not part of itself, and that there is no shame in its praising and pitying the unseasonable grief of another who professes to be a good man. On the contrary, the pleasure which it experiences it considers to be so much gain, and it will not allow its contempt for the poem as a whole to rob it of this pleasure. For only a very few can realize that the character of our own emotions must be affected by the manner in which we participate in the emotions of others. Yet it is so, for if we let our own sense of pity grow strong by feeding upon the griefs of others, it is not easy to restrain it in the case of our own sufferings." [2]

Now, in respect of this criticism of Plato, it may be said at once that it combines a marvellous insight into the essential conditions required for the production of great works of art and literature, with a complete misunderstanding of the nature and effects of artistic representation. Both the central

[1] *Ibid.* p. 604. [2] *Ibid.* p. 606.

principle of the interdependence of art and morals, and the proposal to make "truth" the central test of the merit of the works of both the artist and the poet, are entirely in harmony with the best modern thought. On the other hand the difference between the method of science and the method of art has become fully known by careful analysis of mental processes, and both the essential truth of the pictures of life presented by poets and novelists, as well as the significance and value of the appeal to the emotions—"pathos" we call it—have alike been recognized. This very criticism of Plato affords a signal example of the importance of the increased psychological knowledge which characterizes the modern era; since the want of such knowledge blinded him to excellences, made him exaggerate faults, and finally condemn in this wholesale way those very masterpieces of Greek literature which the whole civilized world has now learnt to admire.

Aristotle, who was the next great thinker to apply himself to the examination of the processes of artistic and literary production, had the advantage of being able to avail himself of the results of Plato's enquiries. Moreover, he was a master of method; and under the comprehensive scheme which he elaborated for the treatment of all manifestations of human activity and of nature, these artistic processes and the creations which they produced formed a separate and distinct department of enquiry. The work in which he conducted this enquiry is the famous treatise on Fine Art, entitled "concerning Poetry." It is brief, fragmentary, and incomplete, and the results which it embodied appear to have been only partially understood by the ancient world; nevertheless it is the foundation upon which all modern criticism has been based. It follows, therefore, that a knowledge of its chief conclusions is a condition precedent to the comprehension of those principles of criticism which, as I have already remarked, are now definitely accepted, and with which we shall subsequently be concerned.

Aristotle, then, broadly characterized all art and creative

literature as processes of imitation or reproduction (*μίμησις*). He traced their origin, as manifestations of human activity, to the same primitive impulse of imitation as that which makes a child "pick up" the language and the manners of its parents; and found their end, or purpose, to be that of giving pleasure. Taking the tragedy as the most perfectly developed form of poetry (the term in which he includes all creative literature), he analysed the constituents of its subject matter, and in so doing he distinguished those characteristic elements which are to be found in a greater or less degree in every work of creative literature, and upon the nature of which, —both regarded separately and in their respective relationships to each other and to the whole work of which they form part—he was of opinion that the merit or value of the given work depends. These elements are: Plot, or web of incident; Character, or the distinguishing qualities of the persons introduced; Diction, or the literary expression of the thoughts or words of these characters; Sentiment, or the mental basis which governs their actions; Stage-representation, and Musical Accompaniment. Now, in this analysis two points must be noticed. First, that in approaching the study of literature through an examination of this one form—the tragedy—Aristotle has been led to include two elements (the two last, *i.e.* Stage-representation and Musical Accompaniment) which are not properly elements of literary composition at all. And second, that this method of examining a work of literature through its external aspects, suggests to him the characteristic test by which he proposes to measure the merit of any given work, namely by asking, "Is this work constructed in the best possible manner, having in view both the form of literature to which it properly belongs, and the general purpose of art, which is to give pleasure?" Aristotle also, continuing his analysis, discusses certain lesser elements in literary composition, such as the construction of the plot, its "development" and "solution," the arrangement of the "episodes," using terms which are still used in the sense in which he used them; and he distinguishes and

contrasts the respective characteristics of tragedy, comedy, and epic, as forms of poetry.

In this formal criticism Aristotle does little more than to tell us not to write an epic as we should a tragedy, nor a lyric as an epic. The infinitely wider acquaintance with the external characteristics of the various forms of literature which has followed the discovery of printing, has made such information, and the rules by which it is conveyed, seem superfluous and unmeaning. Nevertheless, we shall find that a knowledge of these formal characteristics is still useful in enabling us to detect the more essential elements of literary excellence. And, as a matter of fact, modern criticism commenced with an application of these formal rules to contemporary literature, and it was the perception of their inadequateness, as thus applied by the seventeenth century critics, which led to the great advances subsequently achieved, which we shall have to trace in outline in the succeeding chapter.

But Aristotle did much more than this. Incidentally he corrected the misconception of the nature of the method of creative literature which led Plato into such astonishing errors. In so doing he has enunciated certain artistic principles which are as permanently valid as Plato's principle of the interdependence of art and morals. To Plato's charge of unreality, he replies that the pictures of life given by creative literature are not unreal in the sense of being inconsistent with the facts of life; but that their truth is of a different order from the truth of science. Plato being absorbed with that first aspect of literature in which it appears as a source of information, made no distinction between works of creative literature and literature in general. Aristotle shows that the reality or truthfulness of these two kinds of literature cannot be measured by the same test. Taking history as typical of those works of literature in which the actual facts are of first importance, and poetry as typical of those works of literature in which the treatment of the facts is more important than the facts themselves, he writes:—

"The business of the poet is to tell, not what has happened, but what could happen, and what is possible, either from its probability, or from its necessary connection with what has gone before. The historian and the poet do not differ in using or not using metre—for the writings of Herodotus could be put into metre without being any the less a history, whether in metre or not—but the difference lies in this fact, that the one tells what has happened and the other what could happen. And therefore poetry has a wider truth and a higher aim than history; for poetry deals rather with the universal, history with the particular."[1]

In these masterly sentences Aristotle has once for all characterized the method of creative literature, and distinguished such literature from all other branches of letters.

With equal success he replies to Plato's second charge—the charge that such creative literature, being compelled to be sensational by the conditions of successful production, fostered the emotional part of man's nature to the detriment of the higher and intellectual. Taking the appeal of Tragedy to the typical passions of "fear" and "pity" as his text, he replies to this objection of Plato by an argument based upon a medical illustration. The appeal of poetry to the passions instead of permanently fostering the emotional element, purges man's nature by carrying off any excess of this element. When emotion is artificially excited by witnessing a tragedy performed on the stage, the moral system of the spectator is relieved, just as a man's physical system is relieved by a purging medicine. He writes:—

"Tragedy . . . is an imitation of a serious and complete action which has magnitude. The imitation is effected by embellished language, each kind of embellishment varying in the constituent parts. It is acted, not narrated; and it uses the agency of pity and fear to effect a purging of these and the like emotions.[2]

Thus Aristotle justifies and explains the value and meaning

[1] *Poetics*: p. 1451[b]. Translation as before.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 1449[b].

of pathos. And indeed, if we reflect a moment we shall probably be able to find something in our own every-day experience which is in accordance with the words of the great Greek thinker. If we recall the feelings with which we have left the theatre after witnessing a performance of a tragedy, or even the less definite sensation with which we have closed a powerful and well-written novel, we shall probably remember that there was a distinct sense of relief present in our minds. For a few hours we had forgotten our own difficulties and troubles in the sympathy which was aroused in us for the imagined characters of the dramatist or the novelist. If we had given expression in words to this feeling we should have said to ourselves, "Well, after all, my troubles are not so bad as these." And this feeling —based upon a comparison of the circumstances of our own life with those of others—made us more reconciled to our own lot in life, and perhaps, taught us to understand better the meaning of human life as a whole.

The opinions of these two great thinkers embody what was truest and most far reaching in the thought of the ancient world on the subject of literature. There were subsequent writers, both Greek and Roman, who dealt with the same subject; but their work has added nothing to the broad principles thus laid down by Plato and Aristotle. Criticism in the restricted sense of the study of the external characteristics of great authors—such as style of composition, the use of simple or florid language, dialect, and so on, with the authorship and integrity of the actual texts of the several works respectively attributed to them—was practised especially by the Greek scholars of the great literary centre of Alexandria. And as we have already noticed,[1] literary criticism in this restricted sense—in fact the only sense in which it was understood by the ancient world—found its origin in the work done by these scholars between the years 300 and 150 B.C. But even the author of the famous treatise on "the Sublime"—generally said to be Longinus, who lived in the third century

[1] Ch. I. p. 1.

A.D.—although he enlarges upon many of the lesser aspects of successful literary composition, never gives us any ground to believe that he had understood the deep significance of those broad and far-reaching principles which constitute the real merit of this criticism of Plato and Aristotle, and make it, as I have said, embody and express all that is best in the critical thought of the ancient world. The statement of these principles is necessarily incomplete and indistinct; nevertheless it is just here that the thought of the best era of the ancient world unites with modern thought: and it was by taking these incomplete and indistinct expressions as a basis that criticism was able to advance again after so many centuries.

Among the authors who themselves contributed to form the great literature of ancient Rome, there were, of course, some who turned their thoughts to an examination of the forms and methods of literature. But Cicero and Quintilian—to mention the most important—do not advance beyond a re-statement of the comments of Plato and Aristotle upon the more obvious aspects of literary and artistic representation; while the criticism of Horace's "Art of Poetry" consists either of direct transcripts from Aristotle, or of sensible common-places. These latter are expressed with the neatness and facility which we should naturally expect from so great a master of composition in verse; but they neither possess—nor pretend to possess—any value as original contributions to the subject of which they treat.

Chapter IV

Modern Criticism

Before we begin to examine the advances respectively made by certain modern critics, it will be useful to sum up the results which the researches of Plato and Aristotle have so far revealed.

From Plato we have got the principle of the inter-

dependence of art and morality. Not only must the great artist or poet be a good man, but good art and bad art tend respectively to make society moral or immoral. Also, the equally important principle that "truth," in the sense of the essential correspondence of the representation with the reality on which it is based, is the highest merit of a work of art or of a work of creative literature.

Our debt to Aristotle is still greater. To him we owe:—

The identification of poetry, or creative literature, with Fine Art, and the tracing of the characteristic process of both alike to the primitive instinct of imitation.

The detection of the essential characteristic of creative literature, and the definition of it as the presentation of universal, or typical, instead of particular or actual facts—the same truth as that which we now express subjectively, when we say that idealization is the characteristic process of the artist mind.

The distinction between creative literature and literature in general, and the consequent necessity for measuring the truth of the former by reference to the method of art, and the truth of the latter by reference to the method of science.

The justification of the use of pathos, or the exhibition of imagined suffering; and the explanation of its special purpose and method.

In addition to this we have got an analysis of the constituent elements of a typical form of creative literature, and the use of these various elements of plot, character, etc., expressed in a system of formal rules. In harmony with this method we have symmetry, or structural perfection, proposed as the measure of artistic excellence,—a test of the merit of creative literature which is the counterpart of that proposed by Plato.

Modern criticism began with an application of this last formal, and, as we now call it, least valuable part of Aristotle's theory of art and literature. The ample growth of creative literature in Europe which followed the Renaissance,

had been itself succeeded by an epoch of mingled reflection and creation. In this epoch—the xvii and xviii centuries—the study both of nature and of literature was recommenced with fresh ardour and more successful equipments. It was then, when this new literature came to be passed under review, that attention was again turned to the subject of criticism. It was only natural that those writers who began to measure the merit of the modern works should have had recourse to Aristotle's rules; for the "Poetics" —for all that it was written 2000 years ago—was the only work which contained any approach to a definite system of criticism. But it was also to be expected—as in fact proved to be the case—that these canons, based upon a study of the epics of Homer and the works of the Athenian dramatists, would prove inadequate when applied to works which reflected in their changed forms the changed conditions of the modern era. It was strange that this should have been overlooked; nevertheless it was the case, and during the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth century criticism consisted mainly in a knowledge of the formal rules contained in the Poetics, and the work of the critics consisted in the application of these rules more or less rigorously to contemporary literature. In France, especially, which was at this time the centre of European thought and manners, a splendid dramatic literature was produced which was absolutely moulded upon classical models. "Following, or thinking they followed the ancients," Mr Saintsbury writes,[1] "French dramatists and dramatic critics adopted certain fixed rules according to which a poet had to write just as a whist-player has to play the game." The general effect of this artificial system may be seen from the result which is produced upon the great poets of the French "Classical" drama—Corneille and Racine. "This was the source," says Demogeot, "of that severe unity to which Corneille submits and of which Racine bears the yoke so lightly. This was the source of that small number of characters, ever

[1] In his "History of French Literature."

restrained to the indispensable requirements of the plot; of that rapid and uninterrupted progress of a sole and complete action; of those wide deserted porticoes where the persons of the dialogue meet, vague regions, characterless and nameless, the scene of an ideal action carefully purged of every vulgar episode, in such wise that we might say that there is not so much a *unity*, as a *nullity*, of time and place. This immaterial and spiritual action, seems to exist by itself, like thought, and to occupy neither time nor space."

Now this application of Aristotle's rules was both ignorant and mistaken. It was ignorant, because these critics, taking their knowledge of the Poetics for the most part second-hand, frequently misinterpreted his meaning; while the models which they adopted were often not the Greek models at all, but those pseudo-classical models of which the dramas of Seneca were the recognized examples. It was mistaken, because the conditions under which the Greek works were composed were altogether different from the conditions of the modern world. Yet it was possible in France, since the French masters wrote deliberately with an eye upon those very classical and pseudo-classical models upon which this formal criticism was based. But in England the case was different. The greatest of the English masters, the poets of the Elizabethan and Stuart period, rebelled against the servitude to pseudo-classical models: they drew their inspiration from the same sources as those which quickened the national life. The opulence of ideas which followed the recovery of the lost literatures of Greece and Rome, the extension of scientific knowledge, and the discovery of the new world of America and of the ocean highway to the East —this, combined with the energy begotten of a period of national expansion, was sufficient to provide them with a creative impulse which refused to be confined within the limits of any previously developed poetic forms.

Nevertheless, so strong was the influence of the accepted critical creed during the period of French predominance, that Addison, when he set himself to vindicate the greatness of

Milton's genius, was compelled to show that "Paradise Lost" conformed to the Aristotelian tests. It was this application —this attempt to put the contents of a gallon into a pint-measure—which showed him the insufficiency of any system of critical rules based upon a study of the literature of a single epoch, however splendid, and led him to discover a new principle of poetical appeal, and consequently a new test of merit by which the new forms—indeed, all forms—of creative literature could be measured. In his criticism of "Paradise Lost," Addison confines himself, mainly but not entirely, to an application, and an explanation, of Aristotle's canons. But in the "Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination" he avails himself of the new knowledge of the processes of thought embodied in the writings of Descartes, Hobbes and Locke; and it is with the assistance of this new psychological knowledge, that he discusses and applies the principle of the appeal of art to the imagination, which marks the cardinal difference between ancient and modern criticism.

First, then, we will look for a moment at Addison's criticism of "Paradise Lost," as being a typical example of the method of this formal criticism, and afterwards we will notice the character and significance of the new principle of poetic appeal.

Addison gives us the plan of his criticism of "Paradise Lost" in the last of the eighteen papers in the *Spectator* which he devotes to the subject. Four papers are assigned to the examination of the poem under the respective heads of Fable (or Plot), Characters, Sentiments, and Language; that is to the four constituent elements of Aristotle's analysis of the Tragedy which are present in an Epic poem. Two papers are given to the "Censures which the author may incur under each of these heads;" and the remaining twelve are devoted to a consideration of each of the twelve books of the poem in turn; and in this consideration he points out the "particular beauties" which belong to each book, and tells "wherein these beauties consist." As the result of this examination, he pronounces a general verdict

of approval; but at the same time he indicates certain deficiencies. Milton, he says, "excels in general under each of these heads." On the other hand, he finds the "plot" of "Paradise Lost" to be deficient in two respects. First because "the Event is unhappy;" for Aristotle, while he says that the plot of a tragedy should terminate in a disaster, lays down the general rule that an epic should end happily. And secondly, because it contains too many "digressions." Similarly, he finds a defect in Milton's "characters." This defect consists in the introduction of "two actors of a shadowy and fictitious nature, in the persons of Sin and Death." These allegorical characters he holds are not suitable for an epic poem, because "there is not that measure of probability annexed to them, which is requisite in writings of this kind." In advancing this criticism he makes a distinction between them and the character of Satan; for this latter was to all intents and purposes a human character. Once more he complains that Milton's "Sentiments" are marred by the "unnecessary ostentation of learning" shown in his discussions on "Free-will and Predestination, and his many glances upon History, Astronomy, Geography and the like."

But these examples are sufficient to indicate the kind of results obtained from the attempt to estimate the merit of a work of creative literature by the application of these formal rules. They have been cited as illustrations of the barrenness of this method, and not as specimens of Addison's criticism. It is necessary, therefore, to add at once that Addison himself compares the defects thus revealed to "spots on the sun," and that he occupies twice as much space in the more congenial task of indicating those beauties in "Paradise Lost, which appear more exquisite than the rest." In this appreciation he detects and emphasizes most of the characteristic excellences of the great English Epic. In particular he decides—and all subsequent critics have agreed with him—that Milton's dominant quality is sublimity.

"Milton's chief Talent, and indeed his distinguishing Excellence, lies in the Sublimity of his Thoughts. There are others of the Moderns who rival him in every other Part of Poetry; but in the Greatness of his Sentiments he triumphs over all the Poets, both modern and ancient, Homer only excepted. It is impossible for the Imagination of man to distend itself with greater Ideas, than those which he has laid together in his First, Second, and Sixth Books."[1]

But it is in the "Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination" that Addison's great contribution to the science of criticism is to be found. Let me try to state in a few words what was the precise nature of the advance, which is embodied in the proposal to measure the merit of works of creative literature by the degree in which they severally appeal to the imagination.

To do this, it is necessary to look back a little. Aristotle, in showing that the test of truth could not be applied to measure the value of poetry in the way in which Plato had applied it, established the fact that works of creative literature, as being works of art, represented external realities in a different manner from that in which non-creative or scientific literature would represent them. Rightly considered he said such representations were not less but *more* truthful; because under the method of art it was the most essential aspects of realities that were reproduced. Addison, by applying the new psychological knowledge of his age—in particular the doctrine of association of ideas—to the study of literature, notices that works of art, whether statue, painting, or creative literature, by virtue of the reproduction of these essential aspects of reality, work upon the mind of the spectator in a different way than the corresponding raw material (so to speak) of reality: that, in other words, by virtue of the imagination of the artist thus embodied in their sensible atributes they call up images more rapidly and more vividly in the mind with which they are so brought into contact. And

[1] *Spectator*, No. 279.

from this observation he passes to the conclusion that the characteristic merit of such works can be best measured by the possession of this quality—the quality of appealing to the imagination.

It is interesting to trace the steps by which Addison arrived at this conclusion. But it is necessary to notice first of all that he is well aware that "the faculty of the imagination" is nothing more than a convenient term for describing one aspect of the action of the mind as a whole. "We divide the soul," he says, "into several powers and faculties," but, "there is no such division in the soul itself, since it is the whole soul that remembers, understands, wills, or imagines."

In commencing his examination of the effects of this faculty of the imagination, or fancy, he points out that it is the sense of sight which provides the mind in the first instance with the "images" subsequently reproduced in thought: and he describes briefly the mental process to which these sense-impressions are submitted.

"It is this sense," he writes, "which furnishes the Imagination with its Ideas, so that by the Pleasures of the Imagination or Fancy (which I shall use promiscuously) I here mean such as arise from visible Objects, either when we have them actually in our View, or when we call up these Ideas in our Minds by Paintings, Statues, Descriptions, or any the like Occasion. We cannot indeed have a single Image in the Fancy that did not make its first Entrance through the Sight; but we have the power of retaining, altering, and compounding those Images which we have once received into all the Varieties of Picture and Vision that are most agreeable to the Imagination; for by this Faculty a man in a Dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with Scenes and Landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole Compass of Nature." [1]

He then divides these pleasures into two kinds—primary and secondary. Of these the primary pleasures arise from "objects before our eyes"; the secondary, from "the ideas

[1] *Ibid.* 411.

of visible objects, where the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious." Moreover he finds that while the works of nature are more effective in producing the first class, the works of art are more effective in producing the second. It is the secondary pleasures, therefore, with which art and literature are concerned; and these are caused not by real objects but by the representations of these objects. But here again he distinguishes between the two kinds of representations produced respectively by the "arts of the eye" and the "arts of the ear." In the case of those of Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, there is a physical form perceptible by the sight: but in the case of the representations of music and creative literature the sole physical basis is the sound of the notes or words, or the sight of the word-symbols which indicate articulate sounds.

In all cases alike he traces the secondary pleasures of the imagination to "that action of the mind, which compares the ideas arising from the original objects with the ideas we receive from the statue, picture, description, or sound that represents them."

In creative literature, where the ideas are "raised by words," the part played by the imagination is twofold.

In the first place there is the working of the imagination in the mind of the poet:—

"Because the Mind of Man requires something more perfect in Matter than what it finds there, and can never meet with any Sight in Nature which sufficiently answers its highest ideas of Pleasantness; or, in other words, because the Imagination can fancy to itself Things more "Great, Strange, or Beautiful, than the Eye ever saw, and is still sensible of some defect in what it has seen; on this account it is the part of a Poet to humour the Imagination in its own Notions, by mending and perfecting Nature where he describes a Reality; and by adding greater Beauties than are put together in Nature, where he describes a Fiction.

He is not obliged to attend her in the slow Advances

which she makes from one Season to another, or to observe her Conduct in the Successive Production of Plants and Flowers. He may draw into his Description all the Beauties of the Spring and Autumn, and make the whole year contribute to render it the more agreeable. His Rose-trees, Woodbines, and Jessamines may flower together, and his Beds be cover'd at the same time with Lilies, Violets, and Amaranths. His Soil is not restrained to any particular Sett of plants, but is proper either for Oaks or Mirtles, and adapts itself to the products of every Climate. Oranges may grow wild in it; Myrr may be met with in every Hedge, and if he thinks it proper to have a Grove of Spices, he can quickly command Sun enough to raise it. If all this will not furnish out an agreeable Scene, he can make several new Species of Flowers, with richer Scents and higher Colours than any that grow in the Gardens of Nature. His Consorts of Birds may be as full and Harmonious, and his Woods as thick and gloomy as he pleases. He is at no more Expense in a long Vista, than a short one, and can as easily throw his Cascades from a precipice half a mile high, as from one of twenty yards. He has his choice of the Winds, and can turn the Course of his Rivers in all the Variety of Meanders, that are most delightful to the Reader's Imagination. In a word, he has the modelling of Nature in his own hands, and may give her what Charms he pleases, provided he does not reform her too much, and run into Absurdities, by endeavouring to excel." [1]

In the second, there is the characteristic power, possessed by creative literature thus composed, to appeal to the imagination of the hearer or reader. "Words, when well chosen, have so great a Force in them, that a Description often gives us more lively Ideas than the Sight of Things themselves. The Reader finds a scene drawn in stronger Colours, and painted more to the life in his Imagination, by the help of Words, than by an actual Survey of the Scene which they describe. In this case the Poet seems to get the better of Nature; he takes, indeed, the Landskip after her, but gives it

[1] *Ibid.* 418.

more vigorous Touches, heightens its Beauty, and so enlivens the who'e Piece that the Images which flow from the Objects themselves appear weak and faint in Comparison of those that come from the Expressions. The Reason, probably, may be because in the survey of any Object we have only so much of it painted on the Imagination, as comes in at the Eye; but in its Description the Poet gives us as free a View of it as he pleases, and discovers to us several parts, that either we did not attend to, or that lay out of our Sight when we first beheld it. As we look on any Object, our Idea of it is, perhaps, made up of two or three simple Ideas; but when the Poet represents it, he may either give us a more complex Idea of it, or only raise in us such Ideas as are most apt to affect the Imagination." [1]

This element being of such importance, the merit of creative literature can be estimated by reference to it. And so Addison writes that "the talent of affecting the Imagination" is the "very life and highest perfection" of poetry. Here, then, we have a test of merit elastic enough to be applied to all forms, and all developments, of creative literature, but one which takes into account the element of "pleasure," —the last of the three characteristic qualities which belong to it—as well as those of "matter" and "manner." It is this application of psychology to the study of literature which characterizes modern criticism, and all subsequent critics have consciously or unconsciously availed themselves of the principle of appeal thus formulated and interpreted by Addison.

Chapter V

How Creative Literature appeals to the Imagination

We have now, thanks to Addison's application of the seventeenth century psychology to the study of literature and art—the three essential tests of truth, symmetry, and

[1] *Ibid.* 416.

the appeal to the imagination, corresponding respectively to the three dominant aspects of creative literature, matter, manner, and capacity to produce pleasure. But before we proceed to discuss the applications of these tests by contemporary writers, and the questions of criticism which arise out of the varying degrees of prominence which are severally assigned by individual minds to them, we must glance at the work of two modern critics—the *Laocoon* of Lessing, published in 1766, and the Lectures of Victor Cousin, *Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien*, delivered in 1818 and published in 1853.

Both of these writers recognize that the appeal of art is chiefly addressed to the imagination, and only in a lesser degree to the understanding, and the senses; but their respective examinations of the nature of this appeal proceed from two opposite points of view. Lessing, concerning himself with the objective point of view, tells us what elements and aspects of reality the poet and the painter must respectively strive to reproduce, if their several representations are to possess this power; Cousin, on the other hand, writing from a subjective point of view, traces the process by which the raw material provided by the senses is converted by the artist's (or poet's) mind into an idea or form, which, when expressed in the medium appropriate to his art, will appeal most powerfully to the imagination of the spectator. More briefly, Lessing shows us how the artist in representing a reality must modify the material attributes of the original to suit the limitations of his art; and Cousin, how the "idea" or mental aspect of reality, the reproduction of which is the special object of art, is formed in the artist's mind.

The manner in which Lessing pursues his enquiry is interesting both in itself, and because it is a further development of the formal, or external, criticism of Aristotle in the "Poetics." Commencing with a discussion of the date of the famous piece of sculpture, the Laocoon[1] group (from

[1] See *Frontispiece*.

which his treatise takes its title), he notices that there is a remarkable similarity between it and Virgil's description of the death of Laocoon and his two sons in the Second Aeneid. He then argues that, apart from any historical evidence, the date of the sculpture can be fixed by artistic considerations: for if the poet copied the artist he would naturally omit certain details unsuitable for his representation of the scene in *words*; while, similarly, if the artist copied the poet he would omit certain details in the poet's description which are unsuitable for the sculptor's representation in *stone*. Accordingly he considers and compares the details of the two representations, and finally decides that the artist copied the poet, because the differences in treatment which the sculpture shows as compared with Virgil's description are only those which the sculptor would be compelled to make by the character of his medium. In particular he points out that while Virgil tells us that Laocoon utters terrible cries, the sculptor has invested his face with an expression of noble calm. That, he says, is just what we should expect, since it is impossible to express in marble the agonized suffering which Virgil expresses by his words:—

> Clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit:
> Quales mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram
> Taurus, et incertum excussit cervice securim.[1]

The attempt to do this would have resulted in a grimace that must have been either ridiculous or horrible—for sculpture should express physical beauty in repose. On the other hand, if Virgil had seen the sculptured group, and founded his description upon the representation of the death of Laocoon which it gives, he could never have omitted to reproduce in his description the expression of sublime endurance which Laocoon wears—for it is just as easy to describe in words this sublime endurance as it was to express the agonized outcry.

[1] At the same time he raises terrible cries to heaven: cries like the bellowings of a wounded bull that has shaken the ill-directed axe from his neck, and fled from the altar of sacrifice.

From this comparison Lessing enlarges upon a discussion of the respective methods of painting, as representative of the "arts of the eye," and poetry, as representative of the "arts of the ear." And in the course of this discussion he analyses very carefully the means for representing reality which are respectively at the disposal of these two typical arts.

Poetry, he says, "employs articulate sounds *in time*"; that is, sounds which are uttered successively. Painting, "forms and colours *in space*"; that is, which co-exist side by side. The aspect of reality which is most suitable for the painter is "a visible and stationary action [or a group of objects], the different parts of which are developed in juxtaposition in space": that which is most suitable for the poet is "a visible and progressive action, the different parts of which happen one after another in sequence of time." The painter, therefore, can only imitate actions *indirectly*; that is, by painting bodies so disposed as to suggest action. Similarly, the poet can only imitate bodies *indirectly*; that is, by telling us of the actions or effects of such bodies, animate or inanimate. And so the painter, when he represents an action, must choose that single moment of the action, which best suggests what has gone before and what is to come after: and the poet, when he represents a body, must select that single property of the body, which awakens the most vivid picture of it in the mind. A simple instance will help to explain this closely reasoned argument. Let us take a common object; say a ship. The painter represents this object by presenting on his canvas so much of its form and colour as meets the eye of a spectator from a single point of view. The poet, on the other hand, adds to the word-symbol which recalls the idea of a ship to the mind, a single characteristic epithet—the "swift ship." That is only a very simple example, but if I add a remark of Mr Meredith (made in "Diana of the Crossways") I think it will serve to explain Lessing's meaning.

"The art of the pen," Mr Meredith writes, "is to rouse the inward vision, instead of labouring with a drop-scene

brush, as if it were to the eye; because our flying minds cannot contain a protracted description. That is why the poets, who spring imagination with a word or a phrase, paint lasting pictures. The Shakespearian, the Dantesque [pictures], are in a line, two at most." But the great example is the device which Homer uses to give us a sense of the beauty of Helen. Instead of telling us the colour of her cheeks, or the shape of her mouth, nose and eyes,—instead of enumerating in succession the several elements which together make up her beauty of face and form—he tells us of the *effect* which the sight of her produced upon the oldest and wisest of the men of Troy. These elders—the men who would be least likely to be affected by a woman's beauty—when they saw her graceful presence, forgot the wrong which she had done, and the suffering which she had brought upon her country:—

> Οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς
> Τοιῇδ' ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν·
> Αἰνῶς ἀθανάτῃσι θεῇς εἰς ὦπα ἐοικεν.[1]

And what applies to human beauty, applies equally to the beauty of nature; and, therefore, descriptions of scenery are, as such, unsuitable subjects for the poet. It is not that the poet cannot describe such scenes. He can do this because he uses a medium, words or language, which is capable of recalling to the mind any and every conceivable idea. But the writer of creative literature has a different aim from that of the historian or the philosopher. He is an artist, and must employ the method of art; that is, he must compose descriptions which appeal to the imagination and not merely to the understanding. Lessing, although he does not deliberately use the psychological principle of the appeal to the imagination—because, as I have already remarked, he approaches the productions of the respective arts from an external, or formal, point of view—gives us an admirable

[1] *Iliad* III. 156-8. No wonder that the Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans endure evils so long a time for such a woman—she is terribly like the deathless goddesses to look upon.

statement of the application of the principle to the representations of creative literature.

"Since the symbols of speech," he writes, "are symbols adopted by ourselves, it is perfectly possible for us by means of them to indicate the consecutive appearance of the parts of a body as completely as we can perceive those same parts of a body in juxtaposition in nature. But this is an attribute of speech and of its symbols in general, an attribute, too, which does not minister specially to the purposes of poetry. The poet's object is not merely to be intelligible, his representations must be something more than clear and distinct (*this* is sufficient for the prose writer). He desires to make the ideas which he arouses in us so vivid that, as they flash through our mind, we believe that we are experiencing the true, objective impressions produced by the physical originals of these ideas, and in this moment of our illusion we cease to be conscious of the medium which he employs for this purpose, that is, his words. It is this principle which forms the basis of the explanation of the poetical picture." [1]

Cousin's researches form a direct contrast and an admirable supplement to those of Lessing. While Lessing's analyses were conducted upon Aristotelian lines, the broad conclusions of the French critic are admittedly based upon the philosophy of Plato. His object, he tells us, is "to offer at least an outline-sketch of a regular and complete theory of beauty and art." For this purpose he considers in turn; (1) subjective beauty, or the faculties to which man owes his consciousness of beauty; (2) objective beauty, or the qualities which respectively make an action, a thought, a person or a material object, beautiful; (3) the nature of art, or the processes by which the beautiful in real existences is reproduced; and (4) the means and therefore the aims, which respectively belong to the several arts, or how the arts are separated. On all of these aspects of beauty he writes with precision and philosophic insight, but his most important contribution to the science of criticism consists in his masterly

[1] *Laocoon*, XVII., as translated in the author's *Principles of Criticism*.

exposition of the process of idealization—the process which, as we have already seen, is identical with Addison's operation of the imagination in the mind of the poet, and is now recognized as the characteristic process of the artist mind.

"We desire," he says, "to see and feel again the natural beauty, physical and moral, which delights us in the world of reality; and we, therefore, endeavour to reproduce it *not such as it was, but such as our imagination represents it to us. Thence arises a work original and proper to man, a work of art.*"[1] The artist neither creates in the sense in which we speak of God as the creator, nor does he merely imitate. He finds his materials in the world of reality, but he reproduces these materials in a changed form. This change of form is the result of the process of idealization. "The true artist," Cousin writes, "has a profound feeling and admiration for nature; but everything in nature is not equally admirable." What the artist reproduces is an "idea" of the reality which is the subject of his representation; an idea formed in his mind by a double process of selection and omission. If he represents an action, or a person, or an object, it matters not; in all cases in forming this idea he omits defects which were present in the original, and adds excellences which that original did not possess. In a word he idealizes his subject. Idealization, then, is "the unconscious criticism of nature by the human mind,"[2] and it is an idealized reality, and not reality itself, which the artist reproduces in the appropriate medium of his art. In the words of Cousin, the end of art is the expression of moral beauty by the assistance of physical beauty. "The latter is for art only a symbol of the former. In nature this symbol is often obscure; art in rendering it clear attains effects which nature does not always produce. Nature has another means of pleasing us, for once again I say she possesses in an incomparable degree that which causes the greatest charm of the imagination and the eyes, life; art touches us in a higher degree, because, in making the ex-

[1] *Du Vrai, etc.* VIII. [2] *Principles of Criticism.*

pression of moral beauty its first aim, it appeals more directly to the source of the deepest emotions. Art can be more pathetic than nature, and pathos is the sign and the measure of beauty of the highest class." [1]

And of all the arts, poetry, or creative literature, is that in which the idealizing process can work most freely. In the first place, its medium, language, is the most flexible of all the mediums which the respective arts employ, and in the second it is the actual medium of thought, and as such enables the artist to communicate most directly with the mind of the spectator.

"Speech," he writes, "is the instrument of poetry; poetry moulds it to its uses and idealizes it that so it may express ideal beauty. It gives it the charm and majesty of metre, it turns it into something that is neither voice nor music, but which partakes of the nature of both, something at once material and spiritual, something finished, clear, and precise, like the sharpest contours and forms, something living and animated like colour, something pathetic and infinite like sound. A word in itself, above all a word chosen and transfigured by poetry, is the most energetic and the most universal of symbols. Equipped with this talisman of its own creation, poetry reflects all the images of the world of the senses, like sculpture and painting; reflects feeling like painting and music, rendering it in all its variations—variations which music cannot reach, and that come in a rapid succession which painting cannot follow, while it remains as sharply turned and as full of repose as sculpture; nor is that all, it expresses what is inaccessible to all other arts, I mean thought, thought which has no colour, thought which allows no sound to escape, which is revealed in no play of feature, thought in its loftiest flight, in its most refined abstraction." [2]

[1] *Du Vrai, etc.* VIII.

[2] *Ibid.* ix. Translation from *Principles of Criticism*

Chapter VI

Contemporary Criticism

In spite of the fact that great thinkers have from time to time applied themselves to the consideration of the processes of literary composition, and of the relation of these processes to the processes of artistic representation in general, it is only to-day that any definite principles of judgment in literature seem to have at length emerged from the nebulous mass of thought which has thus gathered in the course of centuries round the subject. I say "to-day," for nothing is more astonishing to the student of literature than the blindness which great—sometimes the greatest—men have shown in contemplating the work of their fellows, and especially that of contemporary authors. Putting on one side for a moment the verdicts of what we may call the "professional" critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—critics whose purpose was often frankly "destructive"—we are confronted by the record of a Voltaire declaring that Hamlet was "a rude and barbarous piece—such a work as one might suppose to be the fruit of the imagination of a drunken savage"; of a Goethe expressing the opinion that the *Inferno* of Dante was "abominable, the *Purgatorio* dubious, and the *Paradiso* tiresome"; of a Byron insensible to the charm of an entire choir of English lyric singers, of a Matthew Arnold, acutely sensitive to the beauty and power of the ancient and mediæval masters, yet blind to the genius of the greatest of his great contemporaries—Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Rossetti, and William Morris. While as for this professional criticism—the criticism of which the great reviews which flourished in the early part of the present century have been the chief depositories—there is no more humiliating record of the littleness of human nature than is afforded by the egregious blunders and the envenomed sentences of its exponents. The story is writ large in the pages of the literary journals,

and both Wordsworth in his "Essay Supplementary,"[1] and quite recently Mr Dowden in his essay on the Interpretation of Literature,[2] have collected and exhibited the most extraordinary examples of the mingled perversity and obtuseness which even great writers have displayed in the endeavour to perform an impossible task.

But to-day the practice of attempting to estimate the merit of works of literature—whether contemporary or belonging to past ages—by the application of formal or technical tests has become entirely discredited, if, indeed, it is not practically extinct. Such tests, even if they were perfectly understood by the critic who applies them, would measure excellences or defects which are appreciable by only a limited class, while they leave untouched those broad and dominant qualities, which, appealing to all persons of ordinary intelligence, can alone form the basis of that universal recognition which is the sign and seal of the highest merit. The practice of attempting verdicts upon new works of literature is still maintained in the ordinary criticism of the journals; but while there is much that is often both unbiassed and enlightened in this criticism, it is well understood that the writers of these reviews or notices do not claim to give a binding verdict: that, indeed, the conditions under which such criticisms are for the most part written preclude their writers, however well qualified they may otherwise be, from forming any but a superficial estimate. The criticism embodied in the ordinary "reviews" of the journals we may therefore put on one side as ineffective. Nevertheless the study of literature has never been pursued so widely in England, nor pursued with such happy results, as it is to-day. But before we consider the motives and principles of contemporary English criticism as thus understood, it will be desirable to refer very briefly to some of the more striking of the results embodied in the work of its most distinguished exponents.

[1] To the Preface of his edition of 1815.
[2] *Contemporary Review*, 1886.

Wordsworth, in his protest against the assumptions of the professional critics, has put his finger upon the inherent weakness of any system of criticism which attempts to measure new works of creative literature by rules based solely, or mainly, upon a knowledge of previously existing models. The external qualities which this formal and technical criticism measures exist in complete independence of the element of originality; and it is to the fact that no allowance has been made for this unknown quantity that the failure of this criticism is chiefly due. Smarting under the mingled injustice and indifference with which his own work had been received, he writes:—

"If there be one conclusion more forcibly pressed upon us than another by the review which has been given of the fortunes and fate of poetical works, it is this: that every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed; so has it been, so will it continue to be. . . . The predecessors of an original genius of a high order will have smoothed the way for all that he has in common with them; and much he will have in common; but, for what is peculiarly his own, he will be called upon to clear and often to shape his own road; he will be in the condition of Hannibal among the Alps." [1]

He has also stated with perfect clearness the reason why such formal tests as structure of plot, perfection of metre, purity or elegance of diction, and others on which the professional critic bases his verdict of approval or condemnation, cannot in themselves afford the material for a binding verdict. Mere technical or formal perfection can be attained in works which are destitute of that quality which is essential to secure the permanent appreciation of mankind—the quality of giving pleasure. On the other hand, works which are deficient in such technical excellences may possess this quality in a high degree. The foundation of this quality of giving pleasure is, as we have seen, the power of appealing to the imagination,

[1] *Essay Supplementary.*

and it is precisely the greater freedom with which the poet can avail himself of this appeal that constitutes the higher value of the poetic presentation of the facts of life. But the imagination to which the poet appeals is not that of the critic, but that of the general reader—of the person possessed, not of technical knowledge, but of ordinary everyday intelligence. Indeed, so far from technical qualities affording an absolute basis for the measuring of poetic excellence, these qualities may be developed to a degree that makes them actually hinder the general appreciation or acceptance of the work. "The poet writes," he says,[1] "under one restriction only, namely, that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the poet and the image of things; between this and the biographer and historian there are a thousand."

In other words, the power of giving pleasure by an appeal to the imagination of the reader, is the essential quality which a work of creative literature ought to possess (for it is only by virtue of this quality that the general sense of mankind can be satisfied), and this quality is one which lies outside the reach of any technical test.

But it is in the critical writings of Matthew Arnold that we find the highest example of contemporary English criticism. In his two volumes of "Essays in Criticism" we have studies of foreign and English authors, which exhibit more fully than any similar writings the changed spirit of which I have spoken. It is, of course, impossible within the limits at my disposal to give any conception of the luminous treatment, the lucid expression, or the wealth of illustration which characterize these studies of individual authors; all that can be said here is that the great object which Matthew Arnold the critic has seemed to have placed before him, is to interpret—to gather up all the facts which are of use as indicating the

[1] Observations, prefixed to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

special conditions of the author's personality, and the special motives of his work, and then of tracing the connection between these conditions and the excellences or defects which characterize his work. In short, of providing the reader with that preliminary basis of information which will enable him to read the work of the author with both discrimination and appreciation.

Indirectly, however, in the course of these studies of particular authors he has enunciated certain principles of general application.

(1) He has emphasized and defined the close connexion between the author and the age in which he lives, by pointing out that in every work of creative literature two distinct factors can be discerned—the personality of the writer and the mental atmosphere of the age. Gray is a case in point, and in his essay on his poetry he takes him as an example of a genius planted in an unfruitful soil, and therefore doomed to comparative sterility.

"Gray," he writes, "with the qualities of mind and soul of a genuine poet, was isolated in his century. Maintaining and fortifying them by lofty studies, he yet could not fully educe and enjoy them; the want of a genial atmosphere, the failure of sympathy in his contemporaries, were too great. Born in the same year with Milton, Gray would have been another man; born in the same year with Burns, he would have been another man. A man born in 1608 could profit by the larger and more poetic scope of the English spirit in the Elizabethan age; a man born in 1759 could profit by that European renewing of men's minds of which the great historical manifestation is the French Revolution." [1]

(2) He has broadly characterized the philosophic aspect of all poetic representations of reality by the luminous expression that Poetry is a "criticism of life." That is to say, that the poet or novelist by creating ideal pictures of life, provides an ideal standard with which the facts of real life can be contrasted. And since such a comparison of the real

[1] *Essays in Criticism*, II.

with the ideal helps us to understand the general purpose and conditions of human existence, he defines the special quality of poetic thought as its "interpretative power." In particular, he has distinguished with precision the truth of poetry from the truth of science, and he has told us why it is that poetry by virtue of this power of interpretation becomes, as Wordsworth has said, "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." It is because it appeals to the *whole man*, to the emotions and feelings as well as to the reason. If we understand this interpretative power, as thus defined, to be the subjective aspect of the appeal to the imagination—or the effect in the mind of the hearer or reader which the appeal of poetry produces—we shall find in the following passage a precise analysis of the effects of this appeal in the case of that art—poetry—which possesses it in the highest degree.

"The grand power of poetry is its interpretative power; by which I mean, not a power of drawing out in black and white an explanation of the mystery of the universe, but the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them. When this sense is awakened in us as to objects without us, we feel ourselves to be in contact with the essential nature of these objects, to be no longer bewildered and oppressed by them, but to have their secret, and to be in harmony with them; and this feeling calms and satisfies us as no other can. Poetry, indeed, interprets in another way besides this; but one of its two ways of interpreting, of exercising its highest power, is by awakening this sense in us. I will not now enquire if this sense is illusive, whether it can be proved not to be illusive, whether it does absolutely make us possess the real nature of things; all I say is, that poetry can awaken it in us, and that to awaken it is one of the highest powers of poetry. The interpretations of science do not give us this intimate sense of objects as the interpretations of poetry give it, they appeal to a limited faculty and not to the whole man. It is not Linnaeus or Cavendish or Cuvier who gives us the true sense of animals, or water, or plants,

who seizes their secret for us, who makes us participate in their life, it is Shakespeare, with his

> 'daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty;'

it is Wordsworth, with his

> 'Voice . . heard
> In the spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
> Breaking the silence of the seas
> Among the farthest Hebrides;'

it is Keats with his

> 'Moving waters at their priest-like task
> Of cold ablution round Earth's human shores;'

it is Chateaubriand, with his '*cîme indéterminée des forêts;*' it is Senancour, with his mountain birch-tree; '*Cette écorce blanche, lisse et crevassée; cette tige agreste; ces branches qui s'inclinent vers la terre; la mobilité des feuilles, et tout cet abandon, simplicité de la nature, attitude des déserts.*'" [1]

(3) Poetry of the highest class must exercise this power of interpretation, this appeal to the imagination (or, as Arnold himself calls it, to the "imaginative reason"), within a given sphere; and the accent of the masters of such poetry is the "high seriousness of absolute sincerity."

"For supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life; it must be an application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. These laws fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatment of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness—the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity." [2] And such poetry must be essentially moral; that is to say, it must be such as to satisfy the general sense of mankind as embodied in the principles of morality.

"It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this: that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to

[1] *Ibid.* I. [2] *Ibid.* II.

life—to the question: How to live. Morals are often treated in a narrow and false fashion; they are bound up with systems of thought and belief which have had their day; they are fallen into the hands of pedants and professional dealers; they grow tiresome to some of us. We find attraction, at times, even in a poetry of revolt against them; in a poetry which might take for its motto Omar Kheyam's words: 'Let us make up in the tavern for the time which we have wasted in the mosque.' Or we find attractions in a poetry indifferent to them; in a poetry where the contents may be what they will, but where the form is studied and exquisite. We delude ourselves in either case; and the best cure for our delusion is to let our minds rest upon that great and inexhaustible word *life*, until we learn to enter into its meaning. A poetry of revolt against modern ideas is a poetry of revolt against *life*; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards *life*." [1]

To Mr Ruskin in the field of the Fine Arts, and to William Morris in the field of the Lesser Arts, we owe an unhesitating application of the principle of the interdependence of art and morality. The general character of Mr Ruskin's criticism of works of architecture and painting is sufficiently expressed in his own words. "In these books of mine," he writes, "their distinctive character as Essays on Art is their bringing everything to a root in human passion or human hope." And nowhere else do we find a stronger assertion of the inseparable connection of morality and poetic excellence than in the following passage.

"All right human song is, similarly, the finished expression, by art, of the joy or grief of noble persons for right causes. And accurately in proportion to the rightness of the cause, and purity of the emotion, is the possibility of the fine art. . . . And with absolute precision, from highest to lowest, the fineness of the possible art is an index of the moral purity and majesty of the emotion it expresses. . . . And that is so in all the arts; so that with mathematical

[1] *Ibid.* II.

precision, subject to no error or exception, the art of a nation, so far as it exists, is an exponent of its ethical state." [1]

Moreover Mr Ruskin (like Matthew Arnold) has added increased precision to the principle of the appeal to the imagination. The ideas which poetry and the arts can powerfully stir in the mind by virtue of this appeal, must be ideas which are in harmony with the best traditions of the race.

"I do not say, therefore, that the art is greatest which gives most pleasure, because perhaps there is some art whose end is to teach and not to please. I do not say that the art is greatest which teaches us most, because perhaps there is some art whose end is to please and not to teach. I do not say that the art is greatest which imitates best, because perhaps there is some art whose end is to create and not to imitate. But I say that the art is greatest which conveys to the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas; and I call an idea great in proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, and as it more fully occupies, and in occupying, exercises and exalts, the faculty by which it is received. If this, then, be the definition of great art, that of a great artist naturally follows. He is the greatest artist who has embodied, in the sum of his works, the greatest number of the greatest ideas." [2]

On the other hand there are contemporary writers who emphasize the important principle of the "freedom" of art.

Their point of view is expressed in the phrase "Art for art's sake:" and the principle which they apply is excellently stated by Mr Swinburne—himself distinguished beyond all living masters of song for the perfection of his verse.

"No work of art has any worth or life in it that is not

[1] *Lectures on Art*, III., §67.
[2] *Modern Painters*, I. Pt. I., Sect. I., ch. ii., §9.

done on the absolute terms of art, that is not, before all things and above all things, a work of positive excellence, as judged by the laws of the special art to whose laws it is amenable." And of poetry he writes:—

"The worth of a poem has properly nothing to do with its moral meaning or design; the praise of a Cæsar as sung by a Virgil, of a Stuart as sung by a Dryden, is preferable to the most magnanimous invective against tyranny, which love of country and of liberty could bring from a Bavius or a Settle." [1]

And again:—

"In all great poets, there must be an ardent harmony, a heat of spiritual life, guiding without restraining the bodily grace of motion, which shall give charm and power to their least work; sweetness that cannot be weak, and force that will not be rough. There must be an instinct and resolution of excellence which will allow no shortcoming or malformation of thought or word, there must be also so natural a sense of right as to make such a deformity or defect impossible, and leave upon the work done no trace of any effort to avoid or to achieve." [2]

This doctrine, although it can scarcely be maintained in the extreme form in which it is here stated by Mr Swinburne, is valuable as emphasizing the independence of Art. Although creative literature, and the arts in general, often draw their inspiration from religion and patriotism, they must not be identified with either the one or the other. And again, although the test of truth requires that what the poet writes should be in harmony with the general sense of mankind, a poem or other work of creative literature must not be condemned as inartistic, because the views which it contains are repugnant to the individual critic, or contrary to the received opinions of the majority of his fellow countrymen. It is very difficult, of course, to fix the line, so as to distinguish between what is merely a divergence from a temporary or local standard of sentiment or conduct, and

[1] *Essays and Studies.* [2] *Ibid.*

what is really inconsistent with the principles of morality, and can never, therefore, be in agreement with the general sense of mankind. Owing to this natural difficulty, and a failure to pay due respect to the independence of Art, charges of "obscurity" and "immorality" have been made almost invariably against the works of great writers by their contemporaries. One or two examples will serve to illustrate both the reality of the difficulty, and the nature of the distinction between a divergence from conventional or national sentiments, and a disagreement from the general sense of mankind. Coleridge's "Cristabel" appeared to the Edinburgh reviewer of that day to be "a mixture of raving and drivelling." Wordsworth's Ode on "Intimations of Immortality" ". . . the most illegible and unintelligible part" of the volume to which it belonged. Shelley was advised to publish "a glossary of words" with his poems. The writings of Southey and Wordsworth, now regarded as our most spiritual poets, were originally regarded as dangerous in their moral teaching, since the Lake School found its inspiration in the writings of Rousseau, and was tainted by his discontent at the organization of society. Charles Kingsley's *Yeast* was condemned by the *Guardian*. "It is the countenance the writer gives to the worst tendencies of the day, and the manner in which he conceals loose morality in a dress of high sounding and philosophic phraseology which calls for plain and decided condemnation." But these examples, which might be almost indefinitely multiplied, will suffice to show that the student of creative literature should hesitate before he pronounces an adverse verdict on a new author on either of these grounds; for not only does the artistic merit of creative literature depend upon the recognition of this freedom of art, but its moral value, as one of the forces which make for progress, is also involved. The idea is well expressed by Mrs Browning in *Aurora Leigh*—a book which contains, as she tells us, her "highest convictions upon Life and Art." Of the poets, she says that they are "the only truth-tellers now left to God:—

"The only speakers of essential truth,
Opposed to relative, comparative,
And temporal truths: the only holders by
His sun-skirts, through conventional gray glooms,
The only teachers who instruct mankind
From just a shadow on a charnel-wall
To find man's veritable stature out
Erect, sublime,—the measure of a man."

To this appeal against the tyranny of convention, she adds an equally impassioned appeal against the tyranny of the professional critic.

"And whosoever writes good poetry,
Looks just to art. He does not write for you
Or me,—for London or for Edinburgh;
He will not suffer the best critic known
To step into his sunshine of free thought
And self-absorbed conception and exact
An inch-long swerving of the holy lines.
If virtue done for popularity
Defiles like vice, can art, for praise or hire,
Still keep its splendor and remain pure art?
Eschew such serfdom. What the poet writes,
He writes; mankind accepts it if it suits,
And that's success: if not, the poem's passed
From hand to hand, and yet from hand to hand,
Until the unborn snatch it, crying out
In pity on their fathers' being so dull,
And that's success too."

Nevertheless, important as this doctrine undoubtedly is, it cannot be maintained in the extreme form in which Mr Swinburne advances it, when he says, "No work of art has any worth or life that is not a work of positive excellence, as judged by the laws of the special art to whose laws it is amenable." In the first place, obedience to the laws of art is not alone sufficient to produce that sense of delight in the ideal representation of nature and human life which a work of art must produce, if it is to be accepted by humanity. If we examine the actual conditions under which this sense of delight is produced, we can find a psychological basis for the opposite contention, that the supreme test of merit is agreement with the general sense of mankind.

The feeling of pleasure which arises from contact with a work of art is not produced solely by the external stimulus *i.e.*, the picture or the poem, which appeals to the senses and through them to the imagination, but it depends also upon the effect caused by the re-action of the mind of the person so affected. Now in this second factor—the mind of the person as a whole—the social medium, or general body of contemporary ideas, plays its part. Consequently, if the artist wishes to please, he must present the materials which form the subject of his work in a manner which will agree, and not disagree, with the sentiments embodied in these contemporary ideas. Indeed, the argument may be carried farther; and it may be maintained that it is the adjustment of the rules of the particular art to suit the requirements of the human mind which constitutes the prime merit of the artist.

Or, to approach the question from another side, in a poem, or a picture, or a musical composition, there is one aspect which appeals solely or mainly to persons who are trained in the particular art, while there is another which appeals to all and every one of ordinary intelligence. These latter must by the nature of things be more numerous than the former: and although it would be absurd to consult their opinion in matters of purely technical importance, yet in the question of the general effect of the particular work of art they must be consulted; since the poem or picture, as the case may be, is not produced for poets and artists solely, but for all the world. That the public in general do claim and exercise the right of deciding on the worth of a work of art, and do in fact pronounce the verdict of success or failure, is a matter of common knowledge. Should not, therefore, the faculty of taste or correct judgment which is the property not of a particular class or profession, but generally of all intelligent persons, be the true test, and not the rules of the specific art which are known only to the few? It is quite true that this "taste" will vary from one age to another, and will differ in different societies, just as the standard of

morality varies; but even allowing for these variations there still remains a sufficient basis of agreement to constitute a faculty of taste of permanent validity. If we accept the existence of this faculty of taste, and maintain that "agreement with the general sense of mankind," is the true test, then the effect of a work of art on the world in general must be considered, and its influence for good or bad becomes a factor which cannot be overlooked.

Here we come upon the main drift of Mr Ruskin's teaching; "every principle of painting which I have stated," he says in *Modern Painters*, "is traced to some vital or spiritual fact; and in my works on architecture the preference accorded finally to one school over another, is founded on a comparison of their influences on the life of the workmen—a question by all other writers on the subject of architecture wholly forgotten or despised." According to Mr Ruskin, then, the effect of a work of art for good or bad is not only a factor in its excellence, but a factor of supreme importance; and this conviction is the foundation upon which he, like Plato, has based his whole theory of art. And so he decides with reference to each branch of the arts. In painting, "no vain or selfish person can possibly paint, in the noble sense of the word. . . . Mere cleverness or special gift never made an artist." In architecture, the Gothic style is adjudged to be the best on the same grounds. "In one point of view, Gothic is not only the best but the only rational architecture, as being that which can fit itself most easily to all services, vulgar or noble. Undefined in its slope of roof, height of shaft, breadth of arch, or disposition of ground plan, it can shrink into a turret, expand into a hall, coil into a staircase, or spring into a spire, with undegraded grace, and unexhausted energy. . . ." And as we have seen, in his opinion the greatest artist is the artist "who has embodied in the sum of his works, the greatest number of the greatest ideas." Moreover, he applies this principle no less rigorously to individuals. In his lecture on the realistic school of painting, although he acknowledges Rossetti as "the chief intel-

lectual force in the establishment of the modern Romantic School in England," yet he decides that Holman Hunt is, "beyond calculation greater, beyond comparison happier, than Rossetti," because of his faith in the truths of the Christian religion. "To Rossetti, the old and new Testaments were only the greatest poems he knew; and he painted scenes in them, with no more actual belief in their relation to the present life and business of men, than he gave also to the 'Morte d'Arthur' and the 'Vita Nuova.' But to Holman Hunt the story of the New Testament, when once his mind entirely fastened on it, became what it was to an old puritan or an old catholic of true blood,—not merely a reality, not merely the greatest of realities, but the only reality. So absolutely . . . that in all subjects which fall short in the religious element his power also is shortened, and he does those things worst which are easiest to other men."[1]

And so we have a statement from Mr Ruskin of the relations of morals and art which is precisely opposite to that of Mr Swinburne ". . . the praise of a Cæsar as sung by a Virgil, of a Stuart as sung by a Dryden, is preferable to the most magnanimous invective against tyranny which love of country and of liberty" could inspire. Nevertheless it is significant of the difficulty of the subject that neither of these masters of criticism are perfectly consistent. When Mr Ruskin writes of the faculty of the imagination, he declares, in terms scarcely less definite than those of Mr Swinburne, that this, the distinctive faculty of the artist being, is supreme, and the subject matter of secondary importance. "There is no reasoning in it; it works not by Algebra nor by integral Calculus; it is a piercing, pholas-like, mind's tongue, that works and tastes into the very rock-heart; no matter what be the subject submitted to it, substance or spirit. . . . Every great conception of poet or painter is held and treated by this faculty."[2] While Mr Swinburne, when he comes to criticise a special poem, finds the blemish to consist in certain social and moral views which offend him; so he

[1] *Lectures on Art* II. p. 9. [2] *Modern Painters.*

writes of the "passing perversities of Christianized Socialism or bastard Cæsarism, which disfigure and diminish the pure proportions and noble charm of *Aurora Leigh*."[1]

Both views embody a truth, but not *the* truth. Mr Ruskin's test of conveying "the greatest number of the greatest ideas" is appropriate, when applied to a work of art in its external or objective aspect—the aspect in which art as a whole is regarded as being "the interpretation or expression of moral beauty by the assistance of physical beauty":[2] but it fails if it is applied to a work of art in its internal or subjective aspect—the aspect in which a work of art appears as the expression of the artist's mind, as a "conception converted into a creation."[3] Mr Swinburne's test of "obedience to the rules of the specific art" is appropriate only when applied to a work of art in its external aspect. In forming his conception the artist should be guided by the test of "great ideas"; in executing his conception he must be guided by the "rules of art." He, on the one hand, can never be, by the nature of things, so independent of the mass of mankind, as to make artistic excellence his sole object; on the other, moral worth, however distinctive, can never of itself suffice to endow his work with the characteristic charm of art.

Chapter VII

The Exercise of Judgment in Literature

The preceding chapters have contained examples of the points of view from which certain great thinkers, ancient and modern, have looked at literature. These examples show us, to some extent at least, what are the main qualities which criticism teaches us to admire in works already accepted as part of the literary heritage of mankind, and to look for in new works which have not yet won this acceptance.

[1] *Study of Victor Hugo.* [2] *Cousin.* [3] *Idem.*

Broadly speaking, the development of criticism, as shown by a comparison of the writings of critics in different ages, does not consist so much in the recognition of new qualities as in the more complete comprehension, and the more exact definition, of qualities recognized from the very first: and consequently in the application of new and more appropriate tests by which these essential qualities can be detected. As we have already noticed, the three characteristic qualities of literature as a whole are matter, manner, and the quality of giving pleasure. By *matter* is meant the quality of containing "thought," or contributing to the subjective outlook upon the world; by *manner*, the quality of presenting this "thought" by the method appropriate to the special form of literature to which the given work belongs; while, if a work of literature is to give pleasure, we know that it must be possessed of the characteristic power of a work of art, that is to say, it must "appeal to our imagination," or produce in us that "intimate sense of things" which makes poetic truth more convincing—more easily assimilated by the mind—than scientific truth.

Now all of these qualities were discerned from the first moment when men began to regard literature (and the arts) as a separate and distinct field for the exercise of the higher faculties. Plato, for example, was conscious of the existence of all of these qualities, and he selected the conveying of thought, and thought of the best kind, as the most essential and commanding quality of literature as a whole. But the test by which he proposed to measure the existence of this quality was the degree in which the representations of creative literature approached that naked description of reality which is to be found in those forms of literature in which an element of creation does not enter. In other words he proposed to test the truth of a *representation* by a test which is applicable only to an *imitation*. Or, as Aristotle showed, he did not distinguish between the aspects of reality which the poet sought to represent and those which the historian sought to represent—between the truth of feeling and the

truth of reason. Aristotle again, perceiving that works of creative literature conveyed information to the mind in a different way from that in which works of history or philosophy did, thought that the best way of measuring this characteristic quality was to observe the different forms in which the poetic compositions of recognized merit were composed. But we now take it for granted that a writer of fiction, either in verse or prose, will adopt the appropriate and necessary form of composition, and we look mainly, though not entirely, at the effect which he has produced by his composition as a whole ; and, if we find that his creation possesses the essential quality of appealing to the imagination, we do not trouble ourselves to consider whether in attaining this supreme purpose he has moulded his materials into the precise form of any previously existing model.

If we call the canons which concern such lesser elements as construction of plot, metre, language or diction, and the rest "rules," and those which concern these essential qualities "principles," and thus make a distinction between "rules" and "principles," we can express the change which has taken place in the spirit of criticism by saying that criticism tends in an increasing degree to disregard rules, and to concentrate its attention upon principles. For whereas the application of these rules reveals excellences or defects which vary in importance from one epoch to another, the principles are concerned with qualities of universal importance—that is to say with qualities which are connected with some elementary characteristic of the mind of man. For the appreciation of such qualities is not subject to change under the shifting conditions of human life. The validity of criticism, therefore, depends upon the capacity to distinguish between the permanent elements which are covered by these principles, and the varying elements which are covered by these rules.

The effect of this change is shown in the manner in which the contemporary critic approaches the examination both of works of established reputation and of those new works,

the value of which is as yet undetermined. If he concerns himself with the former he does not seek to *estimate* so much as to *interpret*. He does not search for defects or failures—or if he does, it is with a view of bringing the contrasting merits into stronger relief—but he is rather busied with the discovery and explanation of the qualities revealed by the application of tests based upon a recognition of these principles. He is concerned more with the reader than the author; for his chief aim is to make us understand the special conditions of the author's social and material environment, and of his personal endowment, and to show how these determining conditions are reflected in the character of his work. In this way, by putting us in possession of information which enables us to understand the author's motives and points of view, the critic enables us to estimate for ourselves. In a word, criticism as applied to works of this class, has become the interpretation of literature. In approaching the examination of contemporary works, the critic has a more difficult task. He can at best only give a provisionary verdict; but for the formation of this verdict he relies upon tests which are intended to measure the characteristic merits of matter, manner, and the appeal to the imagination,—and puts on one side the rules which deal with technical and less permanent qualities. Of course, there is no question here of the necessity of observing the recognized rules of grammar and prosody. In general, the compositions in which such rules are violated would not come under the category of literature, and would not, therefore, demand the attention of the critic. I say "in general," because it must be remembered that these rules are themselves based upon the observed practice of great writers; and that the source from which they derive their validity is literary usage. A certain latitude, therefore, must be observed in applying them, for the literary usage which made them, can also extend them: and moreover the spirit of the rule may be obeyed when its letter is broken. With this exception, contemporary

criticism tends more and more to base its tentative judgments of new works upon such principles, as are intended to reveal the presence or absence of those qualities which past experience has taught us to recognize and admire in previous efforts of human genius. And as we have to read contemporary literature as well as the masterpieces, a knowledge of these principles is necessary to enable us to exercise for ourselves a certain judgment in the selection and appreciation of the books which are every day being offered for our consideration. Such contemporary books have a value and attractiveness of their own, which is independent of their literary merit, strictly so-called. They are instinct with the movement of the life around us; they reflect and even discuss questions, the solution of which has an immediate interest for each and all of us; they are vitalized, at any rate for the moment, by the mere fact that they have come straight from the brain of a neighbour. Moreover, unless it be supposed that the fountain of English literature is being suddenly dried up, it is among these contemporary works of literature that we must look for the masterpieces of the future.

Let us see if we can gather up what we have already learnt about these principles into a statement sufficiently clear to be of practical value in guiding us to form a judgment upon books.

The first principle—first in order of historic evolution and first in importance—is the principle of truth. The characteristic quality, which this principle leads us to expect and require in a work of literature, is the essential correspondence between the body of information which the work conveys to our minds and the external realities, or facts of life, of which it treats. This is the principle of the highest validity, for it serves to test the most important of all the qualities by virtue of which a work of art or literature is felt to be in agreement with the general sense of mankind, and, therefore, accepted as a permanent contribution to the intellectual heritage of man. To contribute a new thought to the

world is the highest merit of a work of literature in general, and to contribute this thought in the delightful manner which arises from the appeal to the imagination, is the highest merit of a work of creative literature. Truth, then, is the final test of merit in literature: for if we had to choose between the sacrifice of matter or of manner, we should prefer to lose the latter. For a work which has no correspondence with the facts of life—or which violates any of the universal and fundamental beliefs of mankind—is worthless, however great its purely artistic qualities may be.

But the truth which is required in literature is "essential" truth. That is to say, the nature of the correspondence between the matter of the book and the reality to which it refers will vary in the different forms of literature. And in order to ascertain the presence of this correspondence the test of truth must be applied in the varying degrees appropriate to the several forms. The truth which we expect from the philosopher, the historian, or the biographer, is the actual fact, the "whole truth and nothing but the truth" of a witness giving evidence in a court of law, an entire statement of the necessary facts which is obscured neither by a *suppressio veri* nor a *suggestio falsi*. Perfect candour in the presentation of the sources of information, perfect accuracy in dates, figures, and in the sequence of events or the marshalling of facts, absolute impartiality of opinion where there is a conflict of evidence. From the essayist, the descriptive writer, and the traveller, we require a less rigorous reproduction of the facts which form the foundation of his opinions, or of his pictures of men and places. For here the personal element is more pronounced, and the process of idealization converts his rendering of the facts into representations rather than mere descriptions. That is to say, he tells us not so much what he saw or learnt, but the thoughts and feelings which the scenes of natural objects, or his contact with other men, produced in his mind. And it may well be that he can give us a more real, and therefore more truthful picture of men and manners, and

even of natural scenery, by a free use of the idealistic method of art; by selecting certain features for prominent treatment, by subordinating, or even omitting, details which he considers likely to weaken the total effect which he desires to produce in our minds.

Again, there is the truth which we require in creative literature, whether fiction or poetry. This is the truth of art, for the character and events of the poet and novelist are typical, not actual. The scenes which the poet (or novelist) describes, and the characters which he draws, have no existing originals. The originals are the creations of his mind, as well as the representations, and the proper truth which belongs to fiction is the truth of idea; that is to say, the generalized experience of the individual author must correspond to the generalized experience of the community or of the race. To take examples, "Middlemarch" is not Nuneaton, nor is "Maggie Tulliver" Mary Ann Evans in her girlhood; but if we wanted to get an idea of what life in a Midland town was like, or an idea of the sort of girl that "George Eliot" must have been, where could we get them better than by reading the novels in which the accounts of Middlemarch and of Maggie Tulliver respectively occur? Here are examples of the generalized experience of an individual producing the truth of idea. For no one could fail to recognize the essential correspondence between the descriptions and characters of "George Eliot," and the generalized realities and facts, upon which they are based. Even higher and more permanent is the essential truth of those creations which are based upon a mingling of personal experience and of that universal experience which is embodied in the spiritual traditions of the race. If we wish to "get an idea" of the supreme devotion which is produced by the passion of love, we do not think of the engagement and marriage of one of our acquaintances, but of the story of "Romeo and Juliet"; our idea of devotion to a woman's ideal of duty is based upon the conduct of the Antigone of Sophocles; our idea of knightly duty upon the

Arthur of the "Idylls of the King." The truth of idea which is thus attained in the works of the great poetic masters is in a certain sense superior to the truth of history or biography, or of any mere transcript from reality. Its superiority is due to the fact that the conceptions which it embodies are based upon the generalized experience of more than one age, and of more than one country; that, in fact, it epitomizes the experience of the race. And so, as Aristotle says, "poetry has a wider truth and a higher aim than history; for poetry deals rather with the universal, history with the particular." Or it becomes, as Wordsworth says, "the breath and finer spirit of knowledge."

This truth of idea which we require in a work of creative literature, whether in prose or verse, is in its essence an agreement between the opinions and feelings of the poet or novelist and the general sense of mankind. And since the general sense of mankind on matters of the highest importance is embodied in the code of social laws, the observance of which is called "morality," it follows that the connection between the highest and best creative work and morality is by no means an artificial connection. The morality of one country or of one society differs in certain respects from that of another; the morality of the West is markedly different from the morality of the East: but notwithstanding these differences there are certain principles which—as principles—are universally accepted by all civilized societies. A novel or poem which represents that an immoral man (in this sense) is happier than a moral man, does not possess the truth of idea which is the proper truth of creative literature; for the experience which the author has embodied in his creation does not correspond with the generalized experience of the race as expressed in the laws of morality. Such works, therefore, are condemned by an application of this principle of truth. As morality is the aggregate experience of a given society, or of society in general, the matter of books which are in conflict with morality is *ex hypothesi* condemned by this supreme test of truth.

Secondly, there is the principle of symmetry. It is the adaptation of the external qualities of the given work to the special purpose which it is intended to achieve. As applied to the arts in general it enjoins and requires that the artist should in each case both select such attributes of reality as can be best reproduced by the means at the disposal of his special art, and also confine himself to the employment of these appropriate means in reproducing these aspects. From this external point of view, symmetry is resolved into "composition," or the right selection and the right disposition of materials. As applied to literature, the principle has a twofold significance. In the first place, it applies to literature as a whole; in the second, in addition to this general application, it applies in a special sense to creative literature where the method of artistic representation is employed. In the first case, it requires that the external qualities of literary compositions, *i.e.*, *length* of composition and *form* of composition (prose or verse, narrative, dialogue, or union of narrative and dialogue), should be suitable to the subject matter of which these compositions severally treat. That is a comparatively simple and obvious requirement: for,—to take two extreme instances—a historian, having a great mass of facts to set out, would naturally choose the narrative form, and write in easy prose unfettered by metre, or by any structural limitation of length; while the poet, when he wishes to give expression to a single thought, just as naturally selects a rigidly limited poetic form, such as the sonnet, where he can endow a dozen lines with so much beauty of literary workmanship that his single thought shines like a jewel in an exquisite setting. In this sense, the principle of symmetry applies to all literature, however humble its purpose or form may be. Even a manual of history or science requires to be written with a certain regard for arrangement; that is to say, the subject should be presented as a whole, the facts must be marshalled in their due order, what is essential must be brought into prominence, what is merely accessory must be kept in due subordination.

In the second sense the principle of symmetry applies to creative literature only, since such literature alone employs the method of art in its representations of reality. Here the principle enjoins not merely that the given work should be composed in a manner consistent with the external requirements of the form of poetic literature to which it belongs, but that the limitations imposed upon the artist by the medium in which his creations are expressed should be respected. This medium is, briefly, word-symbols, written or spoken, and capable of expressing the attribute of time by the sequence in which they are presented to eye or ear. Thus understood, the principle of symmetry requires that the artist in words should select for representation certain definite aspects of reality, and not all reality. If therefore a poetic composition is to possess the quality of symmetry, it must, first, be limited as a whole to the presentation of these appropriate aspects of the general mass of the reality—objective or subjective—on which it is based, and, second, in the several elements of dialogue, narrative, description, and soliloquy, the medium of words must be used only to represent such aspects in the respective objects, actions, states of mind, or scenes of material reality to which these elements severally refer, as can be appropriately reproduced by words regarded not as a means of conveying thought, but as a means of presenting mental pictures—that is of appealing to the imagination. The rules which limit and control the artist in words in the use of his medium have been sketched in outline by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, and this outline has been filled in with detail by the fuller researches of Lessing in his study of the respective methods of the contrasting arts of the "eye" and "ear." As I have already pointed out this principle is made by Aristotle the chief measure of the merit of creative literature: and in taking the tragedy as the most highly developed form of such literature, he naturally insists upon the doctrine of the supremacy of the plot. For in the stage play, and to a scarcely less degree in the novel, it is in the construction of the plot that the widest scope is given to the artist in words

for the manifestation of both excellence and deficiency of composition. And so he writes from this standpoint of symmetry, that the plot is "the central principle and soul, so to speak, of tragedy; character is second in importance." And with Aristotle the construction of the plot includes both the selection of suitable materials, and the effective arrangement of these materials by investing the central action with a distinctive prominence, and by keeping the "episodes" in due subordination to this central action, while at the same time they are directly ancillary to it. But whereas Aristotle deals with the symmetry, or correct disposition, of the work as a whole, Lessing tells us how to apply the principle to its separate elements: not how to compose a plot, but how to compose a description of a person, an object, an action, or a scene. Some of the most striking results of Lessing's inquiry have been already set out in Chapter V, and they need not, therefore, be repeated here. They are summed up in Mr Meredith's notable sentence, "The art of the pen is to rouse the inward vision . . . because our flying minds cannot contain a protracted description. The Shakespearian, the Dantesque [pictures], are in a line, two at most." But it will be useful to add the account of character drawing which Sir Walter Besant gives in his "Art of Fiction." It is written in a practical spirit and relates primarily to prose fiction.

"As for the methods of conveying a clear understanding of a character, they are many. The first and the easiest is to make it clear by reason of some mannerism or personal peculiarity, some trick of speech or of carriage. This is the worst, as may generally be said of the easiest way. Another easy method is to describe your character at length. This also is a bad, because a tedious, method. If, however, you read a page or two of any good writer, you will discover that he first makes a character intelligible by a few words, and then allows him to reveal himself in action and dialogue. On the other hand, nothing is more inartistic than to be constantly calling attention in a dialogue to a gesture or a

look, to laughter or to tears. The situation generally requires no such explanation: in some well-known scenes which I could quote, there is not a single word to emphasize or explain the attitude, manner, and look of the speakers, yet they are as intelligible as if they were written down and described. That is the highest art which carries the reader along, and makes him see without being told, the changing expressions, the gestures of the speakers, and hear the varying tones of their voices. It is as if one should close one's eyes at the theatre, and yet continue to see the actors on the stage as well as hear their voices. The only writer who can do this is he who makes his characters intelligible from the very outset, causes them first to stand before the reader in clear outline, and then with every additional line brings out the figure, fills up the face, and makes his creatures grow from the simple outline more and more to the perfect and rounded figure."

Only such works, therefore, as are possessed of this quality of symmetry—that is to say, in which the materials are so disposed and arranged both in the mass and in detail as to catch the "flying mind"—can appeal to the imagination. And so the test of symmetry is indirectly a means by which the presence of this dominant artistic quality can be discovered and measured in a work of literature.

Thirdly there is the principle of idealization. This is a principle which applies only to creative literature, that is to say to such works of literature as are also works of art; which, therefore, must possess that characteristic quality of a work of art which we call from a subjective point of view, "to give pleasure," and from an objective point of view, "beauty." As applied to creative literature this principle enjoins and requires not merely that the mental aspect of reality should be presented by the author, but that a selection from this mental aspect of reality should first be made, and that the selection so made should exclude such matter as affects unpleasantly the aesthetic consciousness of the reader. "Whatever feelings," Victor Cousin writes, "art proposes

to excite in us, they ought always to be restrained and governed by the feeling of beauty. If it produces only pity or terror beyond a certain limit, above all physical pity or terror, it revolts, it ceases to charm; it misses its proper effect, for an effect which is foreign to it and vulgar." It is only by reference to this principle that we can attach a definite significance to the terms "realism" and "realistic" as applied to works of creative literature (and of art in general). No work of creative literature can be "realistic" in the sense that the author has reproduced reality and not the mental aspect of reality: for if the author had attempted to do this his composition would not be a work of creative literature at all. If it is used as a term of reproach, the word can only be properly applied to the work of an author who has so far neglected to select his material—to idealize in fact—that his work has lost the quality of giving pleasure. As, however, this quality of giving pleasure obviously depends upon the nature and character of the individual reader, as much as on the nature and character of the book, the term cannot be used with any precision unless we credit the individual whom the given work fails to please with an average degree of artistic and moral perception. And, since the latter—moral perception—is the more commonly developed, the term has come to bear a significance which is almost equivalent to "immoral," or repugnant to the general sense of mankind. But in thus using the term it is necessary not to forget that its original and wider significance is different. In its wider significance it characterizes any work of literature (or art) in which the author (or artist) has reproduced any subject, or any aspect of a subject, which lessens or removes that "beauty" by virtue of which a work of art gives pleasure.

The most prominent application of the principle of idealization is the doctrine of "poetic justice." According to this doctrine the plot of a work of creative literature should, with the sole exception of the tragedy, "end happily," and so give expression to the deeply rooted sentiment of optimism,

which results from the belief that the universe is governed and controlled by an all-powerful and all-wise Being. In a clear and splendid statement of the principle of idealization as applied to creative literature, Bacon gives us the philosophic basis upon which this doctrine—the propounding of successes and issues of actions more just in retribution and more in accordance with divine Providence—rests.

"Poetry . . . is nothing else but Feigned History, which may be styled as well in prose as in verse. The use of this feigned history hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of men in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it; the world being in proportion inferior to the soul; by reason whereof there is, agreeable to the spirit of man, a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety, than can be found in the nature of things. Therefore, because the acts and events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfyeth the mind of man, poetry feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical. Because history propoundeth the successes and issues of action not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution and more according to revealed providence. Because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore poesy endureth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations. So as it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. And therefore it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind, whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind into the nature of things. And we see that by these insinuations and congruities with man's nature and pleasure, joined also with the agreement and consort it hath with music, it hath had access and estimation in rude times and barbarous regions, where other learning stood excluded."[1]

[1] *Advancement of Learning*. Book II, iv. 1-2.

It will be noticed that the tragedy is excepted from that application of the doctrine of poetic justice, which justifies, and, in general, requires that the plot of a work of creative literature should be so constructed as to finally convey a sense of satisfaction to the mind. The reason is this. The tragedy is a special form of creative literature which depends for its effect mainly, though not entirely, upon *pathos*, or the presentation of human suffering in an acute form. Here the poetic representation is intended to work upon the passions of "fear and pity," to use the terms of Aristotle's definition, and the most powerful means by which this effect can be achieved is to so construct the plot that it ends in a "disaster." For it is by the presentation of a final picture of universal gloom, into which no ray of hope is allowed to penetrate, that the dramatic artist produces that artificial excitation of the emotions of the spectator, to which the special and humanizing effect of tragedy is due. In other words, whereas the termination of the plot in a disaster is essential to tragedy, it is merely incidental to any other form of creative literature: and it is only in such poems or novels as are designedly tragic in motive that the final disaster is necessary. In all others—that is in the general mass of fictions in prose or verse—the natural optimism of healthy humanity can be legitimately satisfied. Indeed, the effect of artistic beauty which belongs to creative literature is in part directly due to this characteristic application of the principle of idealization.[1]

There is, however, a limit to idealization. The principle is itself controlled by the operation of the test of truth, which is the supreme and final test of merit in literature whether creative or non-creative. But it is necessary in estimating the effect of this limit upon creative literature, to remember that

[1] Since writing the above it has been pointed out to me that there was a further and non-artistic reason for the prominence of the "disaster" in the plot of tragedy. The religious motive of sacrifice is present in the Greek tragedy; and where sacrifice or atonement must be made for sin, even the innocent must be involved in disaster.

the truth of creative literature is the truth of idea, not the truth of logic. Realistic treatment,—that is, realism in the acquired sense of the presentation of subjects, or aspects of subjects, repugnant to the moral sense—is sometimes defended on the ground of its superior truth. Art, it is said, has outgrown the stage of the fairy-tale: adult art should present things as they really are. But this argument admits of a very definite answer. The kind of truth which is here required is not the kind of truth that a work of art can yield. For this kind of truth—the truth of science—we must go not to a novel, or a poem, but to a treatise on politics or economics—to the blue-book or the criminal reports. Nevertheless, there is a real and genuine sense in which the principle of truth limits the application of the principle of idealization. When the poet or novelist represents his character as surrounded by the conditions of real life, and, at the same time, as able to act ideally, his presentation is deficient in truth. For the idea so presented is essentially false. Similarly, if he represents his men and women as acting as they would in real life, while the conditions by which they are surrounded are plainly ideal, the idea which he presents is one which has no correspondence with reality. Such works have neither the truth of science nor the truth of art. What is ideal is false because it is made to look as though it were real, what is real is false because it is offered to the reader in the form of the ideal. In short, the whole picture of life is distorted. A work of creative literature cannot be made to present the facts of life in the sense in which these facts are presented in history, biography, or in a scientific or philosophic treatise: if the attempt is made, such a work ceases *ipso facto* to be "creative," and it loses forthwith the characteristic beauty of a work of art. On the other hand the principle of truth controls the application of the idealizing process in two ways. It requires that the idealization shall be consistently applied throughout—otherwise the work will convey a distorted and therefore untruthful idea of the realities upon

which it is based; and it requires that the idealization shall be itself guided by that wide and yet exact knowledge of men and things which is expressed by the term "philosophy." If there is no such basis of wide and exact knowledge to guide the artist in the formation of his mental originals, the characters and scenes which he presents will bear no resemblance to the realities which these mental originals are intended to interpret and explain. The effect of such idealization, uncontrolled by the principle of truth, is to be observed especially in prose-fiction. In the words of Mr Meredith, the art of Fiction under this influence has become "a pasture of idiots, a method for idiotizing the entire population." The ideal of character which it presents is a "flattering familiar," which has become "the most dangerous of delusions." It is only when the novelist has learnt to control his idealizations by the principle of truth, to mould his mental originals into the forms in which philosophy teaches him to express the essential facts of life, that the art "now neither blushless infant nor executive man," can attain its full stature. And he exhibits with perfect felicity the limit to idealization which is set by the principle of truth in respect of that dominant form of creative literature of which he is the greatest living master.

"We can then," he says, "be veraciously historical, honestly transcriptive. Rose-pink and dirty drab will alike have passed away. Philosophy is the foe of both, and their silly cancelling contest, perpetually renewed in a shuffle of extremes, as it always is where a phantom falseness reigns, will no longer baffle the contemplation of natural flesh, smother no longer the soul issuing out of our incessant strife. Philosophy bids us see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty drab; and that, instead of everlastingly shifting those barren aspects, the sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight."[1] But the knowledge of the qualities which contribute to excellence in literature, and of the principles which

[1] *Diana of the Crossways.*

alike require their presence and control the method of their production, is not in itself sufficient to enable us to exercise a correct judgment, to recognize merit and detect deficiency in works of literature. In order to do this we require something further: we must know how to apply these principles to the works we read. Truth is the test which reveals excellence of matter, symmetry is the test which reveals excellence of manner, beauty is the test which reveals the due exercise of the power of idealization. But how can we apply these several tests to any given work? There is only one answer that can be given, and it has been given more than once. The method by which these tests, and the principles which support them, can be applied is *comparison*. Assume that we know not merely that we should look for truth in any given work, but also the sort of truth for which we should look—that is to say, the truth of logic, if the work be non-creative, the truth of art, if it be creative, —if, then, we would ascertain the extent to which the work in question possesses this quality, we must compare it with a work of recognized merit—a masterpiece, or a "classic" as we say—in the same department of literature. Gradually by the study of the best work which has been produced in the several departments of literature, our minds will become so familiarized with the several and characteristic excellences of each, that we shall almost instinctively welcome their presence, and resent their absence. Literary taste, Addison says, is the faculty "which discerns the beauties of an author with pleasure and the imperfections with dislike. If a man would know whether he is possessed of this faculty, I would have him read over the celebrated works of Antiquity which have stood the test of so many different ages and countries."[1] And Arnold gives the same advice. If we are to learn to detect the distinctive accent of poetry of the highest class, the high seriousness of absolute sincerity, we must fill our minds with the beauty and the music of the masters—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton. We must

[1] *Spectator*, No. 409.

keep in our minds "lines and expressions of the great masters, and apply them as a touchstone to other poetry." A few such lines, he adds, "if we have tact and can use them, are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgments about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate." [1]

It is by the study of the masters that "taste" is formed in literature as in art. And by using our knowledge of the work of the masters as a "touchstone"—or more correctly, as Mr Dowden has pointed out, as a "tuning-fork"—we can decide on the general character of any new and unrecognized work. But if we wish to add precision to this general estimate, we must proceed to apply our tests by a more searching and exact comparison, or rather series of comparisons. There are certain passages or scenes which are admitted by common consent to be of transcendent excellence in each branch of literature, and there are other passages in recognized authors which each one discovers and cherishes, because they appeal in a special degree to his own mind. If we desire to estimate the merit of a new work more exactly, we must select a given passage or scene (or several passages or scenes) and compare it with one of these standard passages; taking care, of course, that it is one in which the subject admits of identical treatment, and that, therefore, it affords a fair basis of comparison. In plain words, if we wish to know how X has succeeded, we compare his work with the work of the same kind which A, B, and C have done, and admittedly done well. To give definition to this statement let me take one or two examples from prose fiction.

At first sight, a farmer's walk to church with his family would seem to be a very unpromising subject for artistic treatment. But if we want to know how this or any similar scene can be done, and well done, we have only to read the first half of Chapter xviii in *Adam Bede*. "George Eliot" knew the difficulty of investing so commonplace a subject with artistic

[1] *Essays in Criticism* II. (The Study of Poetry).

grace and philosophic sense, for she tells us as much in the previous chapter: but she succeeded. And we are not surprised to learn—as we do from her diary—that when she read the MS. to George Henry Lewis he was "much pleased." Here, then, is a "standard" passage. If we come across a description of a like subject in a new work, and wish to measure the success which the author has attained, we have only to place the two passages side by side, and read first one and then the other. Or, again, to take an example of a different subject. Most novelists, when they have brought their hero and heroine to the point of a declaration of love, evade the inherent difficulty of describing actions and speeches which are meaningless or ridiculous when separated from the background of intense emotion by which they are accompanied in real life. They generally leave us, therefore, to ourselves, to imagine the scene, or tell us that what took place concerns nobody but the lovers themselves, and would have no interest for the reader. Nevertheless, Mr Meredith in his "Ferdinand and Miranda" chapter of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* not only tells us every word that Richard and Lucy spoke when they met "amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers," but he creates in the mind of the reader such a sense of external beauty, and such an atmosphere of vibrating emotion, that each simple speech and act is welcome, significant, and beautiful. To realize the full meaning of this supreme exhibition of Mr Meredith's art, we should compare this chapter with the corresponding scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. This comparison will serve to bring out the essential agreement in the general method of these great artists in words, and, at the same time, those differences of treatment and thought which naturally result from a difference of literary medium and of mental and social environment.

In both play and novel there is the same love at first sight, the same opposition from parents and kinsfolk making the concentration of the lovers in themselves — the *égoism à deux*—absolute and supreme. In both a brief realization of

happiness is followed by separation, and in both alike the final catastrophe is complete and overwhelming, although it arises in each case out of the merest malignity of fate. In the play, Juliet's bearing is the bearing of a woman of the Elizabethan age; her words are direct and outspoken. In the novel, Lucy Desborough's feelings are wrapped in the reserve of a nineteenth century heroine, and her broken speeches convey her meaning by allusion and half thought.

> "O, gentle Romeo,
> If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
> Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won,
> I'll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay,
> So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
> In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond;
> And therefore thou may'st think my 'haviour light:
> But, trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
> Than those who have more cunning to be strange."

Contrast this frank speech with the dialogue in which Lucy admits her love for Richard, as he holds her hand in his.

"'You will not go?'

"'Pray let me,' she pleaded, her sweet brows suing in wrinkles.

"'You will not go?' Mechanically he drew the white hand nearer his thumping heart.

"'I must,' she faltered, piteously.

"'You will not go?'

"'Oh yes! yes!'

"'Tell me, Do you wish to go?'

"The question was subtle. A moment or two she did not answer, and then foreswore herself, and said, 'Yes.'

"'Do you—do you wish to go?' He looked with quivering eyelids under hers.

"A fainter yes responded to his passionate repetition.

"'You wish—wish to leave me?' His breath went with the words.

"'Indeed I must.' . . ."

Then finally she returns.

"'I think it was rude of me to go without thanking you again,' she said, and again proffered her hand. And so she left him, and . . . The sweet heaven-bird shivered out his song above him. The gracious glory of heaven fell upon his soul. He touched her hand, not moving his eyes from her nor speaking; and she, with a soft word of farewell, passed across the stile and up the pathway, through the dewy shades of the copse, and out of the arch of light, away from his eyes."

These examples have been taken from prose-fiction, a branch of literature which is probably most familiar. But they will, I hope, serve to show how general tests and principles can be applied by similar comparisons in all fields of literature.

CHAPTER VIII

Forms of Literature—Classical and Romantic Methods—Style

First in order both of artistic merit and literary evolution is Poetry, or creative literature in metre.

The arrangement of words in combinations which possess a more or less vivid musical expression can be traced to a primitive impulse in man. The nature of this impulse in its connection with poetry is well set out by Emerson.

"We are lovers of rhyme and return, period and musical reflection. The babe is lulled to sleep by the nurse's song. Sailors can work better for their *yo-heave-o*. Soldiers can march better and fight better for the drum and trumpet. Metre begins with pulse-beat, and the length of lines in songs and poems is determined by the inhalation and exhalation of the lungs. If you hum or whistle the rhythm of the common English metres,—of the decasyllabic quatrain, or the octosyllabic with alternate sexsyllabic, or other rhythms, you can easily believe these metres to be organic, derived from the human pulse, and to be therefore not proper to

one nation, but to mankind. I think you will also find a charm, heroic, plaintive, pathetic, in these cadences, and be at once set on searching for the words that can rightly fill these vacant beats. Young people like rhyme, drum-beat, tune, things in pairs and alternatives; and, in higher degrees, we know the instant power of music upon our temperament to change our mood and give us its own: and human passion, seizing these constitutional tunes, aims to fill them with appropriate words, or marry music to thought, believing, as we believe of all marriage, that matches are made in heaven, and that for every thought its proper melody or rhyme exists, though the odds are immense against our finding it, and only genius can rightly say the banns."[1]

The best division of the several forms of poetry (*i.e.* poetry in verse) is that adopted by the Greeks. Under this system of classification the following chief forms are distinguished—Epic or Narrative, Lyric, Elegiac and Dramatic.

The first of these, Epic, or Story-telling in verse (ἔπος, word; ἔπη, word-poetry), is the longest form of composition in metre. In addition to the narrative in which the poet speaks in his own person, telling the story to the reader—or to the audience to whom such works were originally recited, or chanted with a musical accompaniment—it has a large element of dialogue, in which the poet speaks through the persons of his characters. As compared with a drama an epic possesses two advantages. In the first place, the period of the action is practically unlimited, and, besides the fact that the main action can cover more time, it admits of a greater number of episodes, or subsidiary stories, and of the treatment of these episodes at greater length; and in the second, a greater element of marvel can be introduced, since the actors or events represented are not subjected to the scrutiny of the sense of sight, as is the case when the scenes and actors are before us on the stage. In other words, the poet can use his imagination with greater freedom in an epic than in a drama; and, in point of fact, many of the subjects

[1] *Poetry and Imagination.*

of great epics are obviously supernormal, and many of the characters and incidents are supernatural. On the other hand, the composition of this form of poetry is characterized by an essential difficulty which makes its successful execution exceedingly rare. Its form is so great that it requires a vast volume of thought, and thought of the highest kind, to endow it with dignity, and a genuine and powerful source of inspiration to endow it with life. Properly it should sum up the thought of an epoch or give expression to the aspirations of a people; and that is why in the nature of things the great epics can almost be counted upon the fingers of two hands:—the Hindu epics, the *Ramāyāna* and the *Mahābhārata*, the Iliad and Odyssey, the *De Natura* of Lucretius, the Aeneid, the *Niebelungen Lied*, the *Inferno*, and Paradise Lost. And of these, some are the work of more than one mind and perhaps of more than one generation.

Lyric poetry, as the name implies (λύρα, lyre; μέλη, song-poetry) is poetry originally intended to be accompanied by the lyre or by some other instrument of music. The term has come to signify any outburst in song which is composed under a strong impulse of emotion or inspiration. The last stanza of Shelley's lyric *To a Skylark* illustrates the complete fusion of personality and subject which characterizes such poetry.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest:
Like a cloud of fire,
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

* * * * * * *

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know;
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then as I am listening now.

Elegiac poetry (ἔλεγος, a mourning song) is composed under deep feeling, but in a different mood. It is reflective rather than impulsive, and as such it is marked

by a note of seriousness, often of melancholy. Gray's *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* is a familiar and exquisite example.

> The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
> And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
> Await alike th' inevitable hour,
> The paths of Glory lead but to the grave.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
> Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
> Hands, that the rod of Empire might have sway'd,
> Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre:
> But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
> Rich with the spoils of Time, did ne'er unroll;
> While penury repress'd their noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul.

Dramatic poetry (δρᾶμα, act, stage-play) is poetry composed for the purpose of stage-representation, or written in the form of poetry so composed. As every line is intended to be spoken by one or other of the actors who take the parts respectively assigned to the several characters, there is no direct narrative and no direct reflection. I say no "direct" narrative or reflection, because both these elements are to some extent retained by various devices. In the Greek drama, for example, the epic element of story telling was retained in part by means of the ἄγγελος or messenger—a character into whose mouth long accounts of events outside the immediate action of the play were put. And at the same time the element of "reflection" was provided by the chorus, whose function it was to express in their songs and chants such feelings and reflections upon the events represented on the stage, as the poet would have uttered directly in a lyric or elegiac outburst of song. The Greek drama as a literary composition, was, therefore, a union of the epic and lyric forms of poetry. In the modern drama, both the narrative and reflective element have been curtailed, but the essential elements of plot and dialogue (or the plot expressed in dialogue) have been correspondingly enlarged and developed. Dramatic literature is divided by a broad

line of demarkation into Tragedy and Comedy. The characteristic motive of tragedy is the exhibition of man in unsuccessful conflict with circumstances. In the Attic Tragedy the apparently undeserved disaster which thus overwhelms the man of average morality is explained by the doctrine of *Nemesis*, or inherited curse: that is to say the man himself has not deserved the punishment, but he is punished for the sins of his fathers. In this doctrine the existence of evil is sought to be explained in a manner identical with the declaration of the second Commandment, and in harmony with the general purport of the Jewish and Christian theology. In the Elizabethan drama this undeserved suffering is rather connected with contemporary circumstances; and in the novels of "George Eliot," which were written in respect of their philosophic basis under the influence of the leaders of the positivist school of thought, the same problem is presented in close connection with the scientific principle of heredity, or the transmission of physical and mental defects from parent to child.

In comedy the motive is furnished by the same conflict viewed from an opposite point of view. In unexpected and even in undeserved suffering, provided that it is not so acute as to actively enlist our sympathy, there is an element of satisfaction which arises from the contrast thus presented between our own good fortune and the bad fortune of our neighbours. If a man's hat is blown off by a high wind, and we see him chasing it, or if a passenger arrives on the platform breathless and excited, only to see the train steam out of the station, we laugh: for these are such slight disasters that our perception of the comic element is unrestrained. But if the same person, instead of losing his hat, were to be run over by an omnibus, the sight of his suffering would at once command our sympathy, and instead of mirth an instant sensation of pain and alarm would arise in our minds: for this would be not comic but tragic. Further, if the person to whom the unexpected disaster happens is an evil character, or a character possessed of anti-social

qualities, a sense of satisfaction, or even of downright pleasure, will arise in our minds, even if the disaster be one that is really serious. But this disaster, if it is to be comic, must not involve the sight of actual physical pain, for a spectacle of human suffering in this extreme form will always provoke a sense of horror, unless, indeed, the nature of the spectator be exceedingly hardened, or the circumstances are altogether abnormal. The central motive of comedy is, therefore, to present an exhibition of the irony of circumstances, and the effect which it seeks to produce upon the mind of the spectator is admittedly one of complete satisfaction. It shows him that a great deal of the suffering which he sees around him is deserved—for one of the legitimate motives of comedy is to satirize, or exhibit the ugliness of vice, the ludicrousness of pride based upon conventional distinctions, and the unhappiness of excessive self-regard—and by teaching him to view his own misfortunes as part of the general life of the community, and to himself look upon them from the point of view from which he would look upon the same misfortunes in others, reveals to him the fact that there is a "light side" to the darkest events.

But the drama, that is the representation of a tragedy or comedy in the theatre, includes two further elements besides the literary element—the actual composition in words —with which we are here concerned. These two elements are the interpretation of the words by the intonation, acts, and gestures of the actor, and the representation of the scenery by the various resources, artistic and scientific, which are placed at the disposal of the stage manager. The drama is, therefore, a composite art, in which the author, the actor and the stage manager all combine to produce the total effect: and as the line of development of this art has been rather in the direction of the perfecting of scenic accessories, the importance of the literary element has tended to decline in the modern drama. The greater convenience of prose as a literary medium, and the closer

resemblance of speeches in prose to the practice of real life, has caused contemporary dramatic writers generally to abandon the more rigid poetic forms in which the dramatic masterpieces of the poet have been mainly, though by no means exclusively, composed. Moreover, poetry (strictly so-called) has tended to become reflective rather than dramatic, and prose fiction has now become the great literary vehicle for the presentation of idealized human action. But while the poets' contribution to the drama has declined, the drama itself, regarded as a composite art, has advanced. It has advanced by virtue of an enlightened realism which is manifested in the assimilation of its literary medium to the language of every-day life, in an increased "naturalness" in the actor—due to closer and more intelligent methods of study—and in a gradual approach to complete "illusion" in the *mise en scène* by virtue of a higher regard for historic accuracy and a more complete command of mechanical contrivances.

Creative Literature in Prose.—The dominant and familiar form is the "novel." It is an imagined picture of a man and woman in the spring-time of life, in which the love interest is supreme; and the traditionary plot leads the hero and heroine to the point of union in spite of the malignity of fortune, or the opposition of kinsfolk, in illustration of the line:—

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

In the "romance" the motive of "adventure" is mingled with that of love, and sometimes altogether takes its place. Often, too, the atmosphere is frankly unreal, and supernormal or supernatural incidents and characters are introduced. Where a serious meaning is conveyed by fictions which are otherwise purely imaginative in character and incident, we get the allegory, and the satire. Of this class of fictions "Don Quixote," "The Pilgrim's Progress," and "Gulliver's Travels" are familiar examples.

In addition to these, there is a third class of novels which

possesses characteristics sufficiently well-marked to be distinguished. It is the novel of "local colour." In it the author uses a thin thread of plot to connect what are practically a series of descriptions in which the natural scenery of a given locality, or the salient features of a particular community, are faithfully drawn. Such novels have a value of their own, although they stand to the higher fiction somewhat in the relationship of the photograph to the painting.

The novel has undergone a remarkable development in the nineteenth century. The general result of this development is expressed by saying that fiction has become philosophic. That is to say, writers of the higher fiction have learnt to base both the development of their plot and the evolution of each separate character, upon principles revealed by the scientific study of the processes of the human mind and the ascertained phenomena of racial and individual evolution. In this way the writer of prose fiction unites the results of the generalized experience of the race with those of his own individual observation of the men and women of his own generation. In thus approaching the study of society from an internal, as well as an external, point of view, he is enabled to present studies of life and analyses of character and motive that are intelligible, and therefore interesting, to the men and women of more than one generation and of more than one country.

Fiction, as thus developed, has become a literary vehicle of extreme importance. To some extent it has usurped the function of the stage as the medium for the exhibition of pictures of life by the display of imagined characters in action. This aspect of fiction is well indicated by the picturesque phrase which has been used to describe the novel—a "pocket theatre." At the same time novels are so widely read that it is impossible not to recognize in them one of the greatest—perhaps the greatest—educational force in literature. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that some of the greatest minds of the century should have adopted this form of literature as the vehicle of their thought. Count Tolstoy

in Russia, M. Émile Zola in France, and Mr George Meredith in England, are instances which at once occur of great thinkers, who have definitely contributed to the thought of the century by means of this vehicle.

As a form of literature the novel unites the facts of history and philosophy, and the reflections of the essay, with the element of creation essential to all poetic literature, on a basis of plot, or interwoven action; and while it lacks the music and the structural perfection of compositions in verse, it has the increased precision of prose and complete freedom from the rigid limitations incidental to such structural perfection.

History and Biography.—The characteristic merits of these branches of literature have already been indicated in the remarks which have been made on the principle of "truth." The quality of first importance which such works must possess, if they are to be of permanent value, is the impartiality which results from a natural or an acquired capacity to weigh evidence, united with the power of distinguishing what is essential from what is merely accidental in the mass of material upon which the historian or the biographer respectively bases his narrative. It is by virtue of this impartiality and the exercise of a judicious selection that the essential facts can be disentangled. It then remains to present the facts thus disentangled to the reader in the most effective manner. For this purpose it is necessary to compose descriptions of the several states of society, and of the several localities which form the setting of the chief scenes and incidents in the narrative. In the case of the latter—descriptions of localities—it is generally recognized that the writer should make himself acquainted with the localities in question by personal study conducted upon the spot. And when the events narrated belong to the past, a valuable auxiliary is provided by the historical remains, the inscriptions and the antiquities, which throw light upon them. It is to the extended use of such elements that the greater vitality and picturesqueness which marks the best work of contemporary historians is chiefly due.

While the historian tells the story of the life of a people —or of a single period in that life—the biographer treats of a single individual. If, therefore, the necessary allowance is made for the changes of treatment which naturally arise out of this difference of subject, we may say that the same qualities are required in biography as in history; except, perhaps, that a note of personal sympathy is tolerated or even welcomed in the biographer which would be out of place in the historian.

The *Essay* is distinguished by the brevity of its external form, and by the presence of the element of reflection. It treats a subject from a single point of view, and permits the personal characteristics of the writer to assume a greater prominence than is permitted in the regular and complete treatment of the same subject in a treatise or book. It stands to the treatise in the relation of a sketch to a finished painting, and it has the same kind of merit as a sketch from nature. Just as the sketch is a record of direct and immediate impressions received by the mind of the painter from the study of natural objects made on the spot, so the essay should contain impressions received by the mind of the writer when it has been brought fresh to the consideration of any body of facts. And since the process of selection is employed with more than usual freedom in such writing, the essay is the most artistic of all forms of non-creative literature.

Classical and Romantic.—In the composition of all these works of literature, both creative and non-creative, we can trace the effect of one or other of two opposite tendencies. Of these the first is the tendency to follow the models presented by the works of the masters in each branch, and the second is the conscious desire to break away from these models in one or more particulars with the object of getting nearer to the reality of contemporary life. The danger of the classical method,—as the first is styled—is that of losing vitality by an adherence to those forms and methods of the past which are unsuited for the conditions—mental and social—of the present; the danger of the second, the

Romantic method, is to sacrifice one or the other of these qualities in literature which have been shown to be of permanent value by the experience of past ages, by an endeavour to secure effects, which, though they possess a distinct and appreciable value for the contemporary readers, from their close connection with the movement and thought of the moment, may cease to possess an interest, or even to be intelligible, to future generations. Outside of these extremes the pursuit of either method leads to obvious and characteristic excellences, although these respective excellences will naturally commend themselves to different classes of minds. In the works of writers who are influenced by the traditions of the classical method we expect to find a more perfect literary execution, and the "grand air" which is acquired by association with the great intellects and the great artists of all time. But it is among the authors who follow the romantic method that we look especially for the "something new," which is at once the cause and the effect of the progress of the race, and by virtue of which literature becomes essentially a part of the life of man.

Style.—Finally, a word must be said upon the quality, at once so apparent and so elusive, which is called "style." Just as we are repelled or attracted by the manner of a man with whom we are brought into contact—especially when we make his acquaintance for the first time—so are we repelled or attracted by the style of the author whose work we read. Moreover, as we form an estimate of the character of an individual from our observation of his manner, which is quite distinct and separate from the more precise and definite opinion which we form after we have obtained a more exact knowledge of his actions and qualities of mind, so this feeling for style is something separate and apart from any opinion based upon a deliberate examination of the merit of his work. What manner is to the individual, style is to the writer. It is right, therefore, to say that "style is the man," in the same sense, and with the same reservations, as we say "manners makyth man." For style does not consist in any

quality shown in the construction of sentences, or in the choice of words, or even in the use or neglect of characteristic literary methods; but it is something distinct and apart from these which at the same time affects them each in turn. It is that element of literary composition in which, without any manifestation of treatment sufficiently distinct to constitute either the observance or the breach of any literary rule, the writer unconsciously expresses his own temperament, training, or circumstances. It is the bearing which the writer assumes in the presence of the reader.

A List of the chief Authorities to whom reference has been made in the preceding pages.

[Where not otherwise stated there is no difficulty in obtaining translations of the foreign authors.]

GREEK.

PLATO. The *Republic.* (Also *Phædrus*, *Laws*, *Symposium*, *Hippias Major.*)

ARISTOTLE. The *Poetics.* (Also passages in the *Ethics*, *Politics*, *Metaphysics*, *Posterior Analytics*, and *Physics.*)

MODERN.

BACON. *Advancement of Learning.*

ADDISON. *The Spectator* (especially papers on *Paradise Lost* and on *The Pleasures of the Imagination*).

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SWINBURNE. *Essays and Studies.*

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The names of authors from whom quotations are made are printed in Italics.

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